

## Third Sunday of the Great Fast Veneration of the Holy Cross

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The Thrice Holy Hymn for this Sunday mentions not only the Holy Cross, but also the glorious Resurrection: **“We bow to Your Cross, O Lord, and we glorify Your Holy Resurrection.”** In this way, the Church shows the connection between two opposite events in the life of our Savior.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Gal. 3:13); “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

On the third Sunday of the Great Fast, the Priest places the Holy Cross on the tetrapod for veneration by the faithful. From the Cross of Christ, we gain strength, as the Apostle Paul says: “If we die with Christ, we shall live with him,” and with him we shall be glorified (cf. 2 Tim 2:11).

Let us remember Christ’s love for us, it was His love for the human race that made the Savior carry the Cross. St. John Chrysostom teaches: “The Holy Cross is the power of God, the healer of the sick, the bread of the hungry and the clothing of the naked.” In venerating the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, we acknowledge that it is a sign of God’s love and an instrument of sacrificial death, on which the Son of God sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world. Scripture also confirms this: “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Holy Fathers compared the forty days of Lent to the forty years of the Israelites’ journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. We should note that this Sunday the Cross is mentioned in all the Odes at Matins, with a stress on victory and joy. “Rejoice, O divine and

thrice-blessed Cross, the light of our darkness; you enlighten the four corners of the world with the brightness of the Resurrection. Make us worthy to contemplate in faith the Pasch of the Lord” (Stichera of Ode 8, Matins of the Third Sunday of the Great Fast).

Today the Life-Giving Cross of the Lord lies in the middle of our churches. It inspires and encourages us. Comforted by it as we enter the second half of Lent, we begin to see the end of our journey and the radiance of Easter joy becomes brighter. It is characteristic that at Matins for this Sunday less was said about the Savior’s crucifixion and more about the joy of His Resurrection, about His victory over death: “We bow to Your Cross, O Lord, and we glorify Your holy Resurrection.” The Church thus inspires and strengthens the faithful who have reached the middle of Lent and points the way to the end of our journey—the Bright Resurrection of Christ.

Contemplating the Holy Cross, it is important to realize what humiliation, what terrible torments the Son of God gave Himself to. He was accused of blasphemy, his miracles were attributed to evil spirits, and He was called an insurrectionist. His accusers judged illegally because He was not guilty. Although they had no right to do so, he was mercilessly beaten and tortured in the Sanhedrin. Without having proven guilt, but to please the Jewish leaders, Pilate condemns the Messiah to death on the cross, which was considered the most shameful way to die.

The sufferings of the God-Man were so unbearable that He begged and begged His Heavenly Father, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Yet He did not want to alleviate this suffering: when He was given vinegar with gall, which deadens pain, Jesus refused to drink (Matthew 27:34). The Savior’s death came from the terrible torments of exhaustion. The event was so terrible that even nature trembled (Matthew 27: 51-53).

Dear believers! Let us remember that we have been redeemed by the Precious Blood of our Savior, and that through His merits we have received the highest title: Sons and Daughters of God!