

other than the fact that, even though Christ was elevated upon the Cross, no matter how many saving results it brought to humanity, they're not compared with the triumph of the Resurrection. And for the Church, the prominent and important thing is to greatly stress her dominating first feast, the Resurrection. So the Cross is elevated empty, because He who suffered upon it resurrected. The Cross does not exist and is not honored as an instrument of death, but as a symbol of the Resurrection. And its honor is not due only to the fact that upon it our Savior shed His blood, but mainly to the fact that upon it he was proven lord of life and of death, both when he voluntarily handed over his spirit, as also when on His own, with His Resurrection, He overturned the results of death, securing freedom, salvation, holiness for us.

Archimandrite I. N

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016, SUNDAY BEFORE HOLY CROSS,**

*Theodora of Alexandria, Euphrosynos the Cook,  
Demetrios & Evanthea the Martyrs & their son Demetrianos, Sergius  
and Herman of Valaam, Finland, Afterfeast of the Nativity of the  
Theotokos, Deinol the First Bishop of Bangor*

**tone of the week** *Third Tone*

**EOTHINON :** *First Eothinon*

**EPISTLE:** *St. Paul's Letter to Galatians 6:11-18*

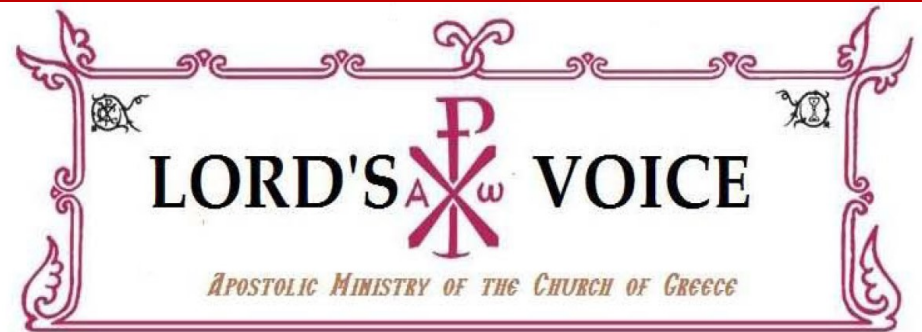
**GOSPEL:** *John 3:13-17*

**NEXT SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016 SUNDAY AFTER HOLY CROSS,**

*Eumenius the Wonderworker, Bishop of Gortynia. Ariadne the Martyr,  
Afterfeast of the Holy Cross*

**EPISTLE:** *St. Paul's Letter to Galatians 2:16-20*

**GOSPEL:** *Mark 8:34-38; 9:1*



64<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

SEPTEMBER 11, 2016

PAMPHLET # 37 (3302)

## THE MEANS OF OUR SALVATION

As we prepare to celebrate the great feast of the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, which according to the liturgical tradition of our Church is equal to Holy and Great Friday – so for this reason also it is a strict fast-, the gospel reading of the day reminds us of another strange elevation which had preceded and had taken place in the middle of the desert, centuries before, during the exit of the Israelite people from the slavery of Egypt. What had happened?

The Jews, not being able to pass through the kingdom of Edom, were forced to make a circle to go around it, through a waterless and inconsolable area. According to their beloved tactic, they again began murmuring and grumbling against Moses and indirectly against God, saying that they took them out of Egypt in order to leave their bones in the desert. Furthermore, while they had manna as food and consequently God's very manifest protection, they showed great ingratitude, characterizing it a tasteless and meager substance. For this behavior of theirs, God allowed poisonous snakes to appear, which led many to death. The Israelites however, after 40 years of wandering in the desert and having the experience of their relationship with God, knew what they had to do to turn His wrath away. They sought the divine mercy and then God gave a commandment to Moses to construct a

## SUNDAY BEFORE HOLY CROSS

### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN 3:13-17

The Lord said, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

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copper likeness of a snake, to place it horizontally on a pole and to elevate this unheard of cross in the middle of the army camp. Whichever Israelite would receive a snake bite, the only thing he had to do was to look with faith in God, at the elevated copper snake, to be saved and to survive from the mortal bite. The copper snake was not saving them, but their faith and obedience to God.

### **The snake, a foreshadowing of human nature**

In general, in the Holy Scripture the snake is considered a personification of evil. Then why does God give a commandment for a copper snake to be elevated in the desert? The poisonous snake, with its deceiving words, led the first created humans to the fall and consequently poisoned our human nature with sin and its consequences. On the contrary, the copper snake, without having poison, was saving people from the results of their sin. The Fathers interpreting, will say that to some degree, a human nature had to be found without sin, to be elevated, to save whoever were

looking towards it. And the only sinless one is our Christ. So He had to be elevated on the Cross, "free of the poison of sin", to deliver us from the poison of sin and to bring saving results of holiness to whoever looks with faith to Him.

The sacred Chrysostom will interpret: "then also the Jews escaped death, but the temporal one, whereas now whoever believes, escapes the eternal death. There the hanging snake, saved from the snake bites, whereas here, the Crucified Jesus heals the wounds of the noetic dragon (of the devil). There, whoever looked with physical eyes was cured, here whoever looks with the eyes of the soul, throws off from him every sin. The snake was biting there and the snake heals, whereas here death overcame (the Crucified One) and death saved (us)." In other words, just as the copper snake was a likeness of the snakes without their poison, thus our Christ also, a partaker of human nature, is deprived of the "poison of sin". And just as those bitten by the snakes, looking at the elevated likeness, were saved, to keep thus also whoever put down by the poison of sin looks with faith at the Passion, of the Savior, surpasses death and lives eternally.

### **The Strangeness of the Elevation of the Precious Cross**

If there is such a strong symbolism between the elevation of the copper snake and the Crucifixion of Christ, then why will the Cross which will be elevated on the feast be without the Body of Christ? Why will the Cross be elevated on its own, without the Crucified One? Only for historical reasons, because thus it was elevated when it was found by Saint Helen, or when it was regained by Emperor Heraclius after the only genuine crusade which history came to know, against the Persians which had grabbed it?

No. The reason for which the Cross is elevated without Him who upon it was elevated and died, is simple. And it is none