

are also able to co-suffer and understand others in their weaknesses and falls, since they themselves are weak. As humans however, they also fall into sins. And for these, they must offer sacrifices to God, just as they also offer for the sins of the people. On the contrary, Christ being sinless, does not need to offer sacrifice for Himself. His sacrifice, which was the sacrifice of his Own Self, was only for us. For the forgiveness of our own sins.

In closing his teaching on today's excerpt "he who was not called by humans but called by God" the Apostle, is not able to not stress the mark which is common both to human priesthood and he priesthood of Christ: both are called by God. They are not self called. The calling is from God. And, if the sinless Christ did not become our self-called high priest, His Father called Him and anointed Him, much more so must the human priesthood not be either the fruit of a noble (even) ambition or – even worse – the satisfaction of the desire for a career. The foundation, beginning, but also perfection of priesthood must be humility and obedience to the divine will, since also the perfect Divine Liturgy of the Crucifictional sacrifice of Christ was the fruit of utter humility and obedience unto death to His Father.

Archim. B. L

### **SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2019 SUNDAY OF THE HOLY CROSS**

*The Holy Hieromartyr Hypatius, Bishop of Gangra , Innocent, Holy Enlightener of Siberia & Alaska, Akakios the Confessor*

**TOPE OF THE WEEK :** *Third Tone*

**EOTHINON :** *Eleventh Orthros Gospel*

**Epistle Reading:** *Letter to Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6*

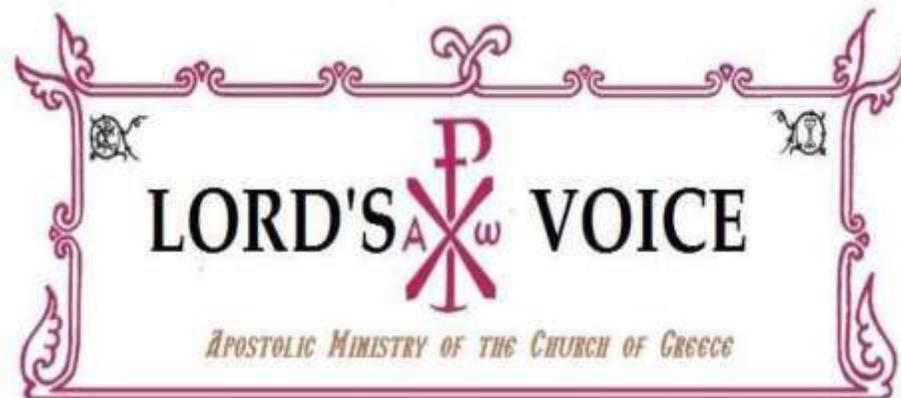
**Gospel Reading:** *Mark 8:34-38; 9:1*

### **NEXT SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019 SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN**

**CLIMACUS** *Calliopos and Akylina the Martyrs , Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Enlightener of North America , Righteous Father Savvas the New of Kalymnos*

**EPISTLE READING:** *Letter to Hebrews 6:13-20*

**GOSPEL READING:** *Mark 9:17-31*



**67<sup>TH</sup> YEAR**

**MARCH 31, 2019**

**PAMPHLET # 13 (3435)**

## **THE CROSS AND THE PRIESTHOOD**

Today, Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, in the middle of our journey to holy Pascha, our Church calls us to venerate the Precious Cross. We remember the Immaculate Passion of Christ, in order to be strengthened in our struggle against our own abhorrent passions, finding the Precious Cross as a support, refreshment, and consolation. Of course, the par excellent fruits of the crucifictional sacrifice of Christ is our rebirth through Baptism, and our participation through the Divine Eucharist, in true life and eternal life; the life of Christ.

### **How do we become coenthroned with the Father?**

What else however, are these Mysteries, but the gifts of the Priesthood of Christ, since Christ with His Cross became our Great High Priest? Dying on the Cross, He performed the highest Divine Liturgy, in which He Himself is both the Sacrificer and the Sacrifice. So on such a day, it is befitting for us to hear the Apostle Paul presenting some facets of the Great Mystery of the priesthood of Christ. This is the teaching that comprises the backbone of his Epistle to the Hebrews. To begin with, our High Priest and source of human priesthood, is not merely a human, but the Son and preeternal Word of God, Who in time condescended for us to become human. His magnitude however,

## ST. PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:1-6

BRETHREN, since we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee"; as he says also in another place, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek."

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does not lie only in His divine nature, but also in that, with His Ascension He also glorified His human nature, enthroning it at the right of His Father. Thus, our High Priest gave us the capability to also inherit divine glory. We are henceforth, able to enter into His incorrupt and eternal Kingdom, at the moment when the first ordained priest, Aaron, and his brother Moses who ordained them, were not themselves granted to enter into the corrupt and temporal Land of Promise.

However, in order for us to become partakers of such a bright inheritance, we also need to toil "keeping the confession" of the true faith. And, naturally, this is not exhausted in merely the "memorization" of the Symbol of our Faith. We also need to become "priests" of our own self, sacrificing the passionate movements of our ego and working diligently to obtain the virtues.

## The only one able to sympathize

In this struggle, we have our high priest Christ as a support. The fact that He is now sitting together as a Godman, at the throne with His Heavenly Father does not mean that He abandoned us. He continues strengthening us in the carrying of our own cross. Furthermore now, the fact that He is inseparably united with His human nature ought to console us particularly, with which not only "did He walk" in the most difficult trip to reverse footpaths of human pain but also "He received experience of the harshest things of all people", says the sacred Chrysostom. He drank, down to the last drop, the bitter cup of human pain. He tasted the most extreme affliction that a person can live. No human that ever lived such great agony, so as to sweat blood! (Luke 22:44).

So for this reason, what a theologian of the West said is not excessive: "The Son of God suffered unto death, not only for people to stop suffering, but in order for their suffering to be similar to His". Probably there is no greater source of strength than this thought, which also comprises the excellent interpretation of the apostolic phrase: "we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15). And "weaknesses" are not only the natural weaknesses or our afflictions, but also every type of temptation, which Christ also experienced, without however, ever yielding and falling into any sin. The Golden-tongued John who is anything other than not having tasted afflictions and trials-but did not manage to hide his experience that "it is possible both in a storm of afflictions and in the burning heat of trials, for one to resist without sinning". And we are able to achieve this, when, with courage and without fear, we fall before the throne of Christ, which now is not "a throne of judgment, but a throne of grace". Only from there are we able to draw strength and suitable help for every critical time of temptation.

## Sinless but not self called

The Apostle Paul giving a reason more so, why those who approach Him will certainly find mercy, he reminds us of one more point in which He surpasses human priests. Human priests, naturally,