



74th Year

March 15, 2026

Pamphlet #11 (3798)

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL (Mark 8:34-38, 9:1)
The message of the cross

The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

THE CROSS AND THE FAITHFUL

As we find ourselves at the midpoint of Great Lent, the Church presents in a very special way the precious and life-giving Cross of the Lord, which it calls us to venerate. That is, to express our gratitude and love, our faith and devotion, our thanksgiving and glorification toward Christ, who was sacrificed for our salvation. Since the Cross is "a weapon of peace and an invincible trophy," a sign of reconciliation and a source of strength, a revelation of the glory of God and of His ineffable love, we are able to understand the significance of today's feast and the value of the words of Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (2nd century), who writes to the Philippians: "He who does not confess the testimony of the Cross is

of the devil." Indeed, for many years now in the Church of Greece, the entire week of the Veneration of the Cross has been established as being dedicated also to priestly vocations, since the Priesthood is a ministry of the Crucified Lord, a participation in His Cross and His Resurrection, a mystery of crucified sacrificial love toward the people of God and the Holy Church.

The meaning of "following and imitating" Christ

The Gospel reading of the day sets forth the conditions for a believer to follow Christ. To follow the Lord means, first of all, an inner relationship with Christ, which is realized through faith, trust in His Person and His word, and then through continual discipleship at His side.

Discipleship consists in – so far as it is possible – the imitation of Christ's way of life. Of course, this imitation does not concern the external aspects of His earthly life, nor is it limited to a merely moral adjustment of the person to those things. For this reason, Saint Basil the Great teaches that the imitation of Christ is not achieved merely through the believer's conformity to the models of Christ's freedom from anger (meekness), humility, and patience, but above all through participation in the death and the Resurrection of the Lord. This participation is accomplished through Baptism and the regeneration that it provides, and through participation in the Divine Eucharist. Thus Christianity, as a relationship of life with Christ, is "an imitation of the divine nature" (Gregory of Nyssa); it is an upward journey toward perfection which, of course, has no end in this life, since its ultimate goal is union with God and the deification of the human person. Therefore, in a single phrase, the moral imitation of Christ does not constitute the believer's ultimate goal, but rather forms the necessary condition for attaining it. The assimilation of the human person to Christ is a prerequisite for his deification, which is accomplished by the Grace of God.

The free taking up of the Cross

God, writes the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, called you to live in freedom. Only do not let your freedom become an occasion for sinful conduct, but through love serve one another (Galatians

5:13). Therefore, freely – “whoever wishes to follow after Me” – Christ calls every human being to follow Him and to take up his cross: a cross of free love and voluntary acceptance. With the Cross of Christ, the believer is taught selfless love, that is, to love as Christ loves: without conditions or limits, without expecting anything in return. He makes use of the gift of his freedom by harmonizing his life with the commandments of Christ, which preserve intact freedom, self-respect, and respect for every human being.

If selfishness, the hoarding of love and of divine gifts exclusively for ourselves, the voluntary submission to the law of sin, and distancing oneself from God constitute a rejection of the Cross of Christ and therefore our self-condemnation, then humility, as an exercise of trust in God, our cooperation in allowing the love of Christ to circulate throughout the whole body of the Church, the inner relationship with God, and the casting off of the yoke of sin, together form the conscious choice to take up the Cross. For this reason, the Church continually calls us to look to the Cross of Christ, to embrace it, and to allow it to teach us that our existence is preserved through communion in the love of God, through which the Lord Himself acts within us.

If we respond to this calling, we will understand what it means that “the word of the Cross... to us who are being saved is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Archimandrite N. K.

March 15, 2026: 3rd Sunday of Lent (Veneration of the Cross)

Agapius and those with him († 303). Aristobulus, Apostle of Britain.
Manuel, New Martyr of Crete († 1792).

Grave Tone – Eothinon: 7 – Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6
– Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1

NEXT SUNDAY: March 22, 4th Sunday of Lent (Saint John of the Ladder)
Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20 – Gospel: Mark 9:17-31

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