

# The Third Sunday of Lent

## *The Veneration of the Holy Cross*



This Sunday is the halfway point in Lent. Midway on our journey to Holy Week and Pascha, many of us are tiring of our spiritual disciplines. What we approached with joy the first week has now turned into a chore. We have become aware how little love we have in our hearts, which can be very discouraging. For this reason, the Church uses this Sunday to direct our attention to the Cross. The Cross is our strength and our salvation. We look to it and pray to Christ to give us strength to complete this journey. The Gospel passage for this Sunday challenges us again to commit our whole lives to Christ. As Christ was crucified for our salvation, we are called to take up our meager cross and follow Christ by crucifying our sinful desires and surrendering our will to His.

Jesus extends His invitation to us once again to "deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him." Many of us have a narrow and limited understanding of self-denial.

We pick and choose at random what we will give up and what we will do in the name of Christianity. We proceed to label them "Our little crosses we must bear." "I'll give up movies and/or TV during lent." Thus we come up with a list of trivialities that have no bearing on the "self-denial" Jesus speaks about in our gospel lesson for today. Christ-like self-denial goes much deeper. It penetrates the facade which hides our hidden sins, our shortcomings and our faults.

Utter denial does not mean depriving ourselves of the necessities of life, nor does it mean we must become paupers and live in rags. Neither does it mean we must lose our individuality, personality and identity. When Jesus speaks of total and utter denial of self, He means we must subordinate our clamoring ego that prohibits us from being the Children of God we were intended to be. Good intentions are not enough. This is why Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

"Take up your cross and follow me" means to get started on our journey to salvation. If the road we are on does not have God's Eternal Kingdom as its destination, then we had better make a U-turn and find the right one!

"Taking up our cross and following Jesus" means trying harder when those moments of calamity, tragedy, sorrow and loss and grief beset us. It means bringing under control our uncontrollable anger, our undue insensitivity, our impatience and impetuosity. It means subduing our temperament and disposition so that we can master them rather than their mastering us.

This Sunday, let us pause with Jesus, to refresh ourselves spiritually, to assess our Lenten journey and to continue with greater determination. But the initiative is still ours. There is no way we can achieve eternal life with God unless we deny ourselves utterly and totally in Christ. This we do when we endure and sustain our own personal crosses and follow Him.

*Shine, Cross of the Lord, shine with the light of your grace upon the hearts of those who honor you. With love inspired by God, we embrace you, O desire of the entire world. Through you our tears of sorrow have been wiped away; we have been delivered from the snares of death and have passed over to unending joy. Show us the glory of your beauty and grant to us, your servants, the reward of our abstinence, for we entreat with faith your rich protection and great mercy.*

