



WEEKLY BULLETIN

BULLETIN BUILDER

Assumption Greek Orthodox Church

September 13, 2020: Sunday Before Holy Cross

SAINTS: Hierotheos the Righteous, Aristides the Philosopher, Valerios, Meletios Pegas, Petros in Atroa
MARTYRS: Cornelius the Centurion; Straton; Kronides, Leontios & Serapion; Gordianos, Slefkos & Makrovios; Loukianos, Zotikos & Eli; Gregory of Kydonia, Gregory of Derkon, Ambrosios of Moschonisia, Prokopios of Ionio, Eftymios of Zelon & Chrysostom of Smyrna

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Feast of the Elevation of Holy Cross: Monday, September 14th, Orthros **8:30 AM**, Divine Liturgy **9:30 AM**

Parklesis (Supplication) to Panagia: Wednesday September 16th at **5:00 PM**

Feast of Saints Sophia, Hope, Love & Faith : Thursday, September 17th, Orthros **8:30 AM**, Divine Liturgy **9:30 AM**

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Matins Gospel Reading - *Third Orthros Gospel, Mark 16:9-20*

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. AMEN.

Epistle Reading - *St. Paul's First Letter to the Galatians 6:11-18*

BRETHREN, see with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. AMEN.

Gospel Reading - *Sunday before Holy Cross - John 3:13-17*

The Lord said, "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven. 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."

The Brass Serpent, the Holy Cross & God's Love for Man

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We hear these words every Sunday before the consecration of the Holy Gifts. But today we hear them in preparation for the feast of the Holy Cross.

Today's reading is from the conversation of our Lord with St. Nicodemus, a Pharisee who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and secretly met Him at night. Nicodemus asked how could he enter the kingdom of God, and the Lord answered he had to be **born again**, born again of water and Spirit. As part of His answer, He also revealed the great love of God the Father and foretold His own crucifixion.

Here, the Lord recounts a well-known story from the Old Testament (Numbers 21:4-9), taking place during the 40 years Moses and Israel were wandering in the dessert. Even though God delivered Israel from Egypt, the Israelites never stopped complaining all along the way. In every difficulty, they kept wishing they were still slaves back in Egypt, where at least they had some tasty onions to eat. For this ungratefulness, God allowed many venomous serpents to attack their camp and kill many. Terrorized, the people begged Moses to save them. Moses prayed to God, and God ordered him to make a serpent out of brass and hang it on a piece of wood in the middle of their camp. Then, whosoever was bitten should look at the brass serpent with faith and they would be saved from death.

The crucifixion of the Messiah is foreshadowed many times in the Old Testament. From all those, however, the brass serpent is the most important! The Lord Himself is teaching us His Crucifixion will work for us like the brass serpent nailed on the wood worked for the poisoned Israelites. Just like the Israelites were saved by looking at the lifted brass serpent, we will also be saved if we look at the crucified Christ. Just like the Israelites avoided physical death coming from venom and reached the Promised Land, we can also avoid spiritual death coming from the venom of sin and reach the Kingdom of God.

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes: Our Lord tasted temporal death, so we do not taste eternal death. In the dessert, the brass snake healed the bite of the real snake; here the crucified Jesus heals the bites of the devil. In the dessert, the serpent killed and the serpent healed; here death destroyed and death saved. In the dessert, death was coming from people's sins; here His death contains no sin [**"He never did nor said any deceitful thing."** (Malachi 2:6)]. His death is **the price He pays** in our place and for our own sins. **With His blood He purchases us**, so now we are not our own but we belong to Him.

So, what is the significance of our Lord being raised on the Holy Cross? It reveals God's great love, who gave His only begotten Son to die the death of a sinner, so all of us who believe in Him will not be lost, but have eternal life.

Notice, however, the brass serpent story very much relies on faith. With it, the Lord is asking us to believe in Him. The result of sin is death. But the antidote to sin and death is His Holy Resurrection. Now, like the Israelites, in order to get the antidote, we should look at the Holy Cross with faith. AMEN.

Lives of Saints

The Elevation of the Holy Cross

In 325 AD, St Helen, the mother of St Constantine the Great, already advanced in years, traveled to Jerusalem in search of the Holy Cross. A temple to Aphrodite had been raised up by Emperor Hadrian on Golgotha, to defile and cover the place of the saving Passion of our Lord. She had the statue of Aphrodite destroyed, and the earth removed, revealing the Tomb of our Lord, and three crosses. The Holy Cross was identified when a near-death woman was healed when placed on one of the crosses. After this, the precious Holy Cross was lifted on high by Archbishop Macarios of Jerusalem; and people cried out, "Lord have mercy." Soon, a portion of the venerable Cross was taken to Constantinople, while the rest was housed in a magnificent church built by Saint Helen in Jerusalem. On 614 AD, the Persians invaded Palestine and took the Holy Cross to their own country. Late, in 628 AD, Emperor Heraclius retrieved the Cross, brought it to Constantinople, and escorted it back to Jerusalem himself, elevating it for the second time and restoring it back to its proper place!

Chrysostom of Smyrna

Born to a middle-class family in Asia Minor in 1867, he was one of eight children. After a proper basic education, he attended the Chalki Seminary (1881-1891). Ordained deacon and presbyter, he soon became chancellor in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In 1902, he was ordained Metropolitan of Drama, in Makedonia, Greece, which was still under Turkish occupation. There, his preaching led to him being exiled twice and was finally transferred to Smyrna, Asia Minor in 1910. A true and fearless patriot, he continued encouraging the enslaved Greeks, resulting in being removed from Smyrna as well. He returned back only when the Greek army captured the area from Turks in 1919. However, in 1922 the defeat of the Greek army in Asia Minor resulted in a vast genocide of all Christians, mainly Armenians and Greeks. Though he had the opportunity to escape, he denied abandoning his flock. On August 27, 1922, after completing the Divine Liturgy, the Turkish commander Nurendin Pasa arrested him and handed him to the angry Turkish mob, who tore him to pieces. He is celebrated on the Sunday before Holy Cross, together with 4 other Metropolitans, the many priests, deacons and the thousands of men, women and children who died horrible deaths in the hands of Turks those days. Memory eternal! AMEN.