

Date: March 18, 2023

Subject: Sunday of the Cross

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We are halfway through Great Lent. Three more weeks of lent, followed by Passion Week, and we will be celebrating the great and joyous Resurrection of our Savior.

MARK 8: 35- 9:1

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

God created people for a blessed life in communion with Him. For this purpose, He established a perfect place for them to live in. And as their Father, He came regularly to teach the first people, Adam and Eve, how to live in this brand new form of life. Therefore, the first people had the most perfect form of prayer with God. They were able to see Him and talk to Him face to face.

But this perfect way of life and everything that God did for them did not satisfy them. Deceived by the devil, they decided that they wanted to be like God. Their pride resulted in their disobedience to God. They broke the only restriction that He had given them. The devil misled them into thinking that their eating the fruit from the forbidden tree would give them the power to be gods. This sin of arrogant pride and disobedience damaged human nature and separated them and their descendants from God.

But the all-merciful God did not abandon His creation. He desired that communion with people be restored. But in order for this to happen, the damage caused by Adam's sin needed to be redeemed, and this could only be done by a person with no sin. Since all people are born with their nature damaged by sin, a new, sinless Adam was needed. This is why the Son of God became a human being. He came to redeem humanity from the damage that was done to human nature by Adam through sin.

Since man separated himself from God through prideful disobedience, Jesus Christ needed to restore humanity back to communion with God by reversing the sin of Adam through the virtue of humble obedience. It had to be the ultimate act of love, accepting death to save others. Jesus did this by dying on the Cross.

The Savior completed His mission successfully. His death on the Cross redeemed mankind. His Resurrection made it possible for people to rise again to an eternal, blessed life. And He sent down to earth the Holy Spirit to establish His Church, through which people could be empowered with the grace that they need to complete an earthly salvific journey to Heaven.

Since Jesus died on the Cross and sanctified it with His Blood, the Cross became a powerful weapon against the forces of evil. The demons flee in terror from it. And it is an indispensable aid to people in

their pursuit of salvation. As Jesus instructs through this Sunday's Gospel: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Despite our Savior doing everything needed for our salvation, we still need to make a choice: do we desire salvation or not? Respecting our free will, God does not force salvation on anyone. He allows us to make our own free choice. We do it by the way that we live here on earth. If we desire salvation, we strive to live according to the commandments that He revealed are salvific. This means that we take up our cross, deny ourselves everything that endangers our salvation, and follow after our Savior. But if we don't want to, we can live as we please. We are free to make this choice, but we will all face the consequences of our choice when we stand before Him in judgment.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we have reached the midpoint in the most important one of these fasting periods. We probably are getting tired, as fasting does take great effort. To strengthen and help us to successfully complete our lenten journey, the Church places before us the Cross, through which our Savior redeemed us. Seeing and venerating this holy and powerful weapon against evil renews our energy and spiritual will to persevere. Therefore, let us come to Church on Saturday night, strengthen ourselves with confession, and receive Holy Communion at the liturgy on Sunday. Then, with renewed strength, we can joyously meet our resurrected Savior as He exits from His tomb.

With Love in the Resurrected Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar