

Keep in Your Heart the Importance of the Cross

“Do Thou, Who of Thine own good will was lifted up upon the Cross, O Christ our God, bestow Thy bounties upon the new Nation which is called by Thy Name; make glad in Thy might those who lawfully govern, that with them we may be led to victory over our adversaries, having in Thine aid a weapon of peace and a trophy invincible.”

This hymn sung in Orthodox Churches the Sunday after our celebration of the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross is a reminder that the Cross of Christ is “a trophy invincible.”

Too often in so many of the “Christian” Churches throughout America, including the Ancient Orthodox Church, the Cross of Jesus Christ has been reduced to two sticks on a wall, a logo on a simplistic bumper sticker, or a piece of jewelry to sport around the neck or hang over a far too revealing blouse.

In short, we have forgotten the *cost* of the Cross, and the *victory* of the Cross.

I know an Orthodox Priest who was once confronted by a shopper in the store who wise-cracked about the Priest’s Cross he was wearing.

“Why do you have a cross with Jesus still on it? Don’t you know He rose from the dead? That’s the problem with you Catholics [the shopper didn’t know the Priest was Orthodox], you leave Jesus hanging on the cross!” said the shopper.

The Priest calmly responded, *“We depict Christ on the Cross because that is where He died brutally for you and me, something we all need to remember. If I wanted to wear something depicting the victory of His Resurrection, I would wear an empty tomb around my neck, not an empty cross.”*

As one Orthodox Priest has stated: *“What once was looked at with horror as an instrument of death now is cherished as the instrument of life---indeed, everlasting life, and the sign of victory over death. What Satan used to kill the Son of God turned against him and became the assurance of his own obliteration.”*

It wasn’t just the cross that made the victory, the hope, and the promise of everlasting life possible for us. It wasn’t just the cross alone that defeated death and Satan. It was, indeed, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who, of His “own good will was lifted up upon the Cross,” where he died that we may live.

In an Orthodox Christian meditation read on the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross (September 14), we were reminded: *“Knowing the truth about the Cross, we address what is essentially an instrument of execution in a personal manner -- adoring it, greeting it and falling down before it as the footstool of Christ our God. We know its power to guide, heal, raise the dead, and deify men. God, for His part,*

provides the Passion accounts of the Lord's Crucifixion to help us understand the truth of the Cross."

At Pascha (Easter) each year, Orthodox Christians around the world begin singing the joyous Paschal hymn, *"Christ is risen from the dead trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."*

The movie "The Passion of the Christ," which so graphically depicted the painful brutality of Jesus arrest, trial, beatings, humiliation, mocking, crucifixion and death, gave maybe two minutes or less to the conclusion of the Passion of Christ, the "amen" to His death on the cross: the empty tomb.

What began on the Cross – our death with Christ -- was completed through the empty tomb; our resurrection with Christ.

Yes, many faithful Christians around the world, whether they go by the name of Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox, do remember what the Cross of Jesus Christ is all about.

To be faithful to Christ and to properly honor the cost and victory of the Cross, rather than using its symbol for bumper stickers or just another piece of jewelry, whether it be inwardly, outwardly, or both, we should always be ready to adore it, greet it, and fall down before it, thereby acknowledging with more than simple thoughts and words, that the death of Christ upon the Cross, was, is, and always will be a victory over adversaries, a trophy invincible.

And, as we stand looking wide-eyed into the empty tomb, with hearts bursting with eternal joy, we rejoice in both the Cross of Christ and His empty tomb, which is an everlasting reminder of the promise and guarantee of our life after death, the assurance of our reconciliation with the Heavenly Father ". . . to all and on all who believe" (Rom.3:22).

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