



As we approach the Holy Week, let us meditate on the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and prepare ourselves to receive the spiritual benefits that lie ahead for those who believe in the cross.

For "*as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:14,15). Therefore, let us reflect upon the Cross, and as we do so a lot of powerful revelations concerning the nature of God and the nature of things will begin to unfold to us. Some of these things are:

1. The power of God.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Every time we look at the Cross, it brings to our mind the might and ultimate power that God has. Although the Holy Bible records incidents of how powerful Satan could get; for example, he was able to hinder Archangel Gabriel from delivering a message to Daniel the prophet to the extent that Archangel Gabriel had to call upon Archangel Michael to help him deliver the message (Daniel 10:12,13) yet, the only One that could defeat Satan was our Lord Jesus Christ with the Cross, crushing him under His feet and stripping

him off of all power and dominion (Colossians 2:15). In addition, our Lord Jesus Christ granted His followers the same power to defeat Satan with the same means which is the sign of the Cross. Thus Satan will remain defeated for ever as long as we keep this powerful tool before us; and every time Satan launches his attacks through evil thoughts and temptations, we should be able to defeat him with the sign of the Cross, reminding him of his utter annihilation in the battle that took place at Calvary; and how our Lord was able to bind him, and limit his authority.

2. The love of God.

"When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine, says the Lord God" (Ezekiel 16:8). When we look at the Cross we remember how God's ultimate love for man, promised in the Old Testament through Ezekiel's prophetic word has been fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross and recorded by John, the Evangelist, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"*

(John 3:16). The Cross is a concrete vivid manifestation of Gods love for us.

When God wanted to reveal His love for us, He did not do it by words, but by deeds, by dying on the cross; for "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down ones life for his friends*" (John 15:13). That is why in time of despair, when Satan tries to poison our heart with feelings of despair instigating such negative emotions of being rejected and forsaken by God, the best remedy is to look up to the Cross. This is because when I look to the cross, it reveals to me the greater love of our Lord. The Lord hates sin, but loves sinners, so much so that He came personally to save them. When our Lord stretched His arms on the Cross, He sent a message to each one of us that if we return to Him, there is always a place for each one of us between His arms, and in His heart.

3. The Holiness of God.

"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, (who is) holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the peoples, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27). Here St. Paul is telling us that our Lord was a Holy sacrifice, undefiled, able to save us. Since our sin was against

God, it required someone like God to atone for it. Salvation could not have been fulfilled except by a Holy one without blemish, and without sin. "Neither an angel nor an archangel, nor a Patriarch nor a prophet you have entrusted for our own salvation, but you yourself came down, and was incarnate and saved us" (St. Gregorys Divine Liturgy). Every time we look at the Cross we remember the Holiness of God for "*In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them; in His love and His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old*" (Isaiah 63:9). St. Peter in his first epistle urges us to conduct our lives in a holy way as our Heavenly Father in order to gain fellowship with Him. This explains further why during the trial, of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord said to the one that slapped Him, why did you slap me? One might think that this saying contradicts our Lords teaching of turning the other cheek. However, it does not, because during the trial our Lord had to defend Himself against the accusation of breaking the Law. But when the soldiers started slapping Him, He neglected His cheeks to those who smite. Under those circumstances, our Lord was before a double-fold task: that of proving He is a Holy sacrifice without blemish or sin in order for His sacrifice to be accepted, and that of implementing His own

teaching of leaving His cheeks to the soldiers to be smitten after the trial.

4. The salvation of God.

"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the words spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (Hebrews 2:1-3). Every time we look at the cross we remember what our Lord had to endure in order to grant us salvation. Salvation is a free gift from God to us, and the main purpose of the incarnation was for our Lord to save us. He became man, suffered, shed blood, and died on the cross only to save us. We sometimes find it hard to labor, strive, and fight against sin in order to maintain this salvation. However, every time we fall away through sin we need to return and go back to the Lord and receive this free gift of salvation from Him. In the Divine Liturgy we pray, You taught us the ways of salvation. We have to utilize the means, and go through the channels of baptism, repentance, and communion in order to be worthy of accepting this free gift.

5. The forgiveness of God.

"And you being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of the requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14).

Every time we look at the cross we know that there is no condemnation on us, and that our Lord Jesus Christ forgave us all our sins. Satan tries to deceive us by convicting us of our sins and unforgiveness causing us to fall in the sin of despair. In this effect, Mar Isaac the Syrian says, "There is no sin without forgiveness except the sin without repentance." All sins are subject to the free gift of forgiveness provided they are preceded by and crowned with repentance. When we become fully aware that the crucifixion of our Lord is the sole means by which our sins are forgiven then we should be very careful and watchful not to commit sin, because sinning will renew the suffering of our Lord. This time the suffering is far beyond the physical suffering of the crucifixion. During our Lords moment of grief in Gethsemane, sweating blood and breathing pain, He asked the Father if He could take this cup away from Him, That cup was not just the physical pain He was about to undergo, but in essence it was the load of

sin that was about to be put on Him. At that moment He knew he had to carry our sins in His body, becoming a sin and a curse so that we could be forgiven. St. Paul says, "*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree)*" (Galatians 3:13) and also "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

6. The Humility of God.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Thus St. Paul exhorts us to acquire the same humble mind of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we look at the Cross, we remember God's greatness shrouded in humility. The sin of Adam and Eve was a sin of pride since they wanted to exalt themselves. That is why humility is the only remedy to pride; and it was only through His humility that our Lord was able to save us, and crush Satan. Such lowliness confused Satan;

so much so, that he kept asking the same question, If you are the Son of God? He could not comprehend the language of humility, and how God could become a man. Satans pride created confusion in his mind disabling him from understanding the mystery of humility which is the mystery of the cross. When we acquire humility and lawlessness of spirit, and accept to decrease, letting others to increase, we will then be able to defeat Satan and escape his traps. St. Paul says that if we humble ourselves before God, He will exalt us, and give us a name above all names (Philippians 2:9). The first daughter of humility is obedience. If we are stubborn, arrogant, and opinionated, all these being signs of disobedience and pride, we will not be able to attain salvation. The Bible teaches us that "*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble*" (James 4:6).

7. The wisdom of God.

"But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews, a stumbling block and to the Greeks, foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than man and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:23-25).

Israel was waiting for an earthly king. However, when the Lord declared that his Kingdom is not of

this world, they were stumbled. On Hosanna Sunday they greeted Him with palms shouting This is the King of Israel. But when He went in the temple, and preached about His kingdom, they refused Him and ended up crucifying Him on Friday. This way they had proved that they did not comprehend the wisdom of God that through the Cross He will become a heavenly King and not an earthly one. Although the Greeks were well known for their intellect and philosophy, their minds could not understand the mystery of the Cross, nor the wisdom of God, thus considering the incarnation and the crucifixion foolishness. What we perceive foolishness is actually wiser than our wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Whenever God does not make sense to us we turn to our wisdom and intelligence and start to rely on them Then gradually we convince ourselves of the credibility of our intellect as a sole source of wisdom; and so the wisdom of God becomes mere foolishness in our sight. That is why a lot of Gods commandments do not make much sense to us at the time being until we start to apply them. For example, in the matter of tithing, our human reasoning will never be able to comprehend how after paying the 10%, the 90% will turn into 100%. For the same reason St. Peter was not ready to allow our Lord to wash his feet because he could not understand how the master would wash

the feet of the servant. However, our Lord came up with the right answer in the right context "*What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this*" (John 13:7). Under the same precept and in an attempt to subject Gods mind to their human understanding, many denominations have shunned the early church teachings concerning the doctrines. So to them, the Holy Eucharist is not the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ but only symbolic commemoration of them. This is because in spite of all the biblical evidences especially the Holy Gospel of St. John 6, and the Holy Book of 1 Corinthians 11, they still cannot comprehend with their mind how the bread and wine through the descending of the Holy Spirit are changed to the Body and blood of Christ. How true is the proverb "*Do not be wise in your own eyes*" (Proverbs 3:7) and also "*lean not on your own understanding*" (Proverbs 3:5).

8. My value to God.

"Knowing that they were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). When we look at the Cross, we see our priceless value in the eyes of God. Because our Lord

Jesus Christ has paid a very costly price, His Body and Blood, to redeem us, we are very precious in the eyes of our Lord. Knowing that, we should have no worries about anything in the world. St. Paul says *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also freely give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32). Realizing the value of the human being in the eyes of God, servants and clergy are to be filled with holy love for, zeal and desire to search for the lost sheep with patience and persistence, and work hard towards the salvation of everyone.

9. The vanity of the world.

"But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Every time we look at the Cross we know that we are crucified to the world, and the world to us. In Baptism which is a fellowship and participation in the crucifixion and death of our Lord, we are buried with our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it is no longer we who live, but our Lord Jesus Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). If the world is crucified to us, it follows that the world is dead to us, and accordingly we should not desire anything from the world, and the world should not tempt dead people. The Cross

reminds us that we are dead with our Lord Jesus Christ in order to live with Him. If we still pursue the pleasures of the world, then we are putting ourselves in a position of enmity to God. The Holy Bible says, "*Love of the world is enmity to God*" (James 4:4). But those who crucify their desires and passions with our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 5:24), they will live and be glorified eternally with Him. So every time I look at the cross I forget the vanity of the world and remember that I am dead with our Lord Jesus Christ.

10. The wickedness of sin.

"Who Himself bore our sin in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24).

Here St. Peter says, every time I look at the Cross I remember how wicked sin is, how our Lord Jesus Christ had to suffer, and was crucified because of my sins. In that sense we should deal with sin very seriously without compromising or adopting a laid back attitude towards it.

May God who was crucified on the Cross for our salvation put His Cross in our heart, so that we can

say with St. Paul, "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*" (Galatians 2:20).

Glory to God forever. Amen.

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