

THE NARTHEX

The believers were first called Christians at Antioch

ACTS. 9:26

September-October 2013

The Orthodox Church of St. Dunstan of Canterbury, Poole

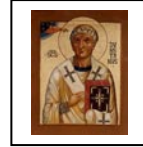
The Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of The United Kingdom and Ireland
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

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THE HOLY CROSS

The month of September sees the start of the Church's liturgical year. Along with this, we celebrate the first of the Great Feasts of the calendar, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross. From the moment we start our pilgrimage of faith in Christ to the time when we come to die, we are signed with the Holy Cross. From Baptism, we are marked with the cross; indeed, we are baptized into Christ's death. And at the end, our graves are blessed with the sign of the cross, *sealing the tomb unto the coming of our Lord, God and Saviour*. For us the cross is ubiquitous: with it we bless our food and receive blessings ourselves; we mark it on liturgical books and vestments and set it on our church buildings, adorn our walls and graveyards and frequently sign ourselves as a mark of benediction. But the Cross must be more than this. For if it be only adoration, only decoration, only the wearing of a kind of 'badge', then we are dealing in religiosity, not true religion; we are concerned with the outer, not the inner man.

It is right, then, that we remind ourselves at this season that in coming to venerate the Holy Cross in liturgical services, we are not just going through the motions but, rather, we are also taking up the cross, as commanded by Christ in the gospel and all that that implies. For there is a false notion (not necessarily just found in heterodox Christianity outside the Orthodox Church) that through his crucifixion and death Christ has taken away all

our pain and suffering. This is evidently not so. By His pure sacrifice he takes upon his own shoulders the effect of all sin in all the world and in all ages. With Him it dies upon the Cross; He expiates and casts out our sin. Having become what we are through his incarnation, we, through Baptism, have a share in what he is. In Christ, we too have died and, more importantly, we stand risen with Him. The question for us now, still in this life, is what kind of persons would we, could we, should we be?

The essence of true religion is not that we are trying to change the way that the world works in order to suit our own convenience. The man who prays that he might find a parking space for his car is not religious but rather, indulging in a ritual of magic. The truly religious person prays that *God's will be done on earth*; that they themselves, not the world, be changed. Herein lies our relationship with the Holy Cross; literally, the crux of the matter.

We shall mostly see this in ourselves when it comes to our temptations. Our problem is that we imagine that our humanity is really bound up with what we have known since the beginning of our lives. From our earliest days we have been motivated by our appetites. In this world they are necessary in a straightforward sense. Our first cries for our mother's milk is driven by the need to feed and survive. But what happens when we can consider and expect anything more than we need. Food, here, is a good example, for we soon learn

the addictive draw of pleasure, feeding the cravings in our mind beyond what the body needs. Indeed, pleasure in itself becomes the primary concern and in a trice we are seduced into the idea that the fulfilment Life itself is predicated upon the idea of the pursuit of pleasure.

In part, one of the reasons we observe the fasts that mark the Orthodox liturgical year, is precisely to do the opposite. Even with our children we can introduce them gradually to the idea of fasting from time to time, teaching them that curbing and controlling our natural instincts and appetites, so that they do not arrive at adulthood dominated and enslaved to the whims of their cravings. This, then, in one aspect of our life, is what we mean by taking up the Cross. This compulsive side out our nature comes from the Old Adam, drowned sacramentally in the waters of Baptism, he is still attached to us; a kind of Zombie-self that St. Paul would call 'the body of death'. [see: Romans chapters 6 & 7] However, through the ascetic life, the life of the Cross, we learn to dump the old man at the side of the road and move on.

This is certainly not to say that all pleasure is somehow wrong; that would be Puritanism which is alien to Orthodox Christianity. The good things of creation were made for us to enjoy - we were made for Paradise. The problem is that we have fallen and our relationship with the created order has been spoiled; it now has to be used with caution. Food, needed for our life

here, is therefore is to be enjoyed with thanksgiving and, moreover, shared with those who do not have enough. Yet gluttony is a sinful passion to be curbed by moderation and, at times, with the cross of fasting. Righteous anger against injustice stimulates action to restore the moral balance but the mere expression of irrational anger is a sinful passion poured out against all that does not suit us and is to be curbed by bearing the cross of humility and patience. Our erotic instinct promotes the communion of man and woman and bears fruit in the birth of children through the blessing of marriage. But in our fallen nature lust is a sinful passion to be curbed by the cross of chastity.

All the passions, signs of life in the old Adam, are similarly to be put to death through the Cross. The great paradox is that for the carnally-minded person, indulging our desires and cravings, having and taking as much as we can until sated, is precisely what is understood by liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The gargantuan appetite, the wrathful, domineering tyrant, the amoral Don Juan, is exactly the model, if an extreme one, of the worldly man exercising his free will. The truth is, such a man is in fact a slave; enthralled by his appetites, he becomes an addict, imprisoned within the confines of his own desires and forced into a dance macabre in which the music never stops. Those of you who enjoy good writing might search out a Victorian writer, Margaret Oliphant, not much read now, I suspect. She wrote an eerie short story called *The Land of Darkness*. It tells the story of a man's journey through a nightmare vision of hell. At one point he meets a beautiful woman sitting in a café. Her pursuit of a life of indulgence has condemned her for ever to wear the rictus of a false smile, appearing to

to be happy but her eyes reveal the pain of her imprisonment, trapped in the body of death, the old Eve.

However, what we are to discover is that the only real freedom comes about when we realise our true nature in the image and likeness of Christ. To be truly human as God intended, to have real free will, is to be liberated from the passions through the Cross and to make the will of God our own will. This is exactly why we pray every day: *Thy will be done*. In other words, we are changed; the world will go on, as it has since The Fall but we have been delivered. We have to remind ourselves again and again that the service of God is perfect freedom. For those on the outside of the Kingdom of God, for those who do not know repentance (Metanoia – changing the mind and way of thinking) this is a restricted life, madness, the prospect of boredom. But for us who see the world through different lenses it is the narrow path that leads to fulfilment and eternal life.

This is not the whole meaning of the Cross but it is a part of it and for as much as we can undertake the ascetic struggle, we shall gain its blessings. We fall many times yet we have the grace of confession and absolution to set us free once again from the tyranny of the old man. So in this season let us embrace the Holy Cross once again both with the outward man and the inner, kissing the Cross in veneration and with reverence in the heart. Let St. Paul have the last word:

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! [Romans 7:22-25]

Fr. Chrysostom

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturday's at 5.00pm in the Saints of Britain chapel. Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards. The *Proskomedie* is served at 9.0am and *Orthros* before the Liturgy at 9.30am.

SEPTEMBER

Sun 1st The Indiction - The Beginning of Ecclesiastical Year No Liturgy - Fr. Chrysostom on holiday

Sun 8th Sunday before the Elevation Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sat 14th Elevation of the Holy Cross

Sun 15th Sunday after the Elevation Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 22nd 13th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 29th 14th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

OCTOBER

Sun 6th 15th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 13th Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 20th 17th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 27th 18th after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10am

