



# **Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church**

**24 BURKE ROAD**

**FREEHOLD, NJ 07728**

**Third Sunday of the Great Fast**

**March 27, 2011**

**Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel  
J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors**

**Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158**

## **We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure**

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

*It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.*

## **GLAD TIDINGS**

+++ The Scripture Study Class meets on Tuesdays at 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Please come and join us by investing time in learning our precious faith so we can better enjoy and live it! The public is invited to participate with us, so invite a friend or neighbor. In preparation for this week, please read the seventeenth to twentieth chapters of the Book of Genesis.

+++ Today we have festal anointing on the occasion of this past week's solemn feast of the Annunciation to the Birthgiver of God.

+++ The fourth All Souls' Day will take place this Saturday with the Divine Liturgy celebrated at 9:00 AM followed by a Memorial service. Please join us in prayer.

+++ We acknowledge with deep gratitude the generous and kind offering this past week of gifts to the parish in the amount of \$65.00 in blessed memory of our beloved departed parishioner, +Paul Pallas. We pray the merciful Lord provide a blessed repose for the soul of +Paul and grant him Eternal Memory as we thank the generosity of these gracious souls. Any others who would like to join this exclusive list, please see Father as soon as possible.

+++ We have received this past week \$40.00 as gifts to the church from our parishioners in blessed memory of our beloved +Metropolitan Nicholas. We thank the gracious souls who made the offering and continue to pray the merciful Lord provide blessed repose to the soul of +Metropolitan Nicholas and create for him Eternal Memory!

+++ We invite all to participate in the blessed grace of this sacred season as we celebrate the Presanctified Gifts Liturgy Friday evening at 7: 30 PM. Father is preaching on persons surrounding the Cross of the Lord.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received this past week: Tithe Offering, [REDACTED], Candles, [REDACTED]; Food Coupons, [REDACTED]0; Kitchen, [REDACTED]; Self-Denial, [REDACTED] +Paul Pallas Memorial Gifts, [REDACTED], Bulletin, [REDACTED]; Christian Fellowship, [REDACTED] Metropolitan Nicholas Memorial Gifts, [REDACTED], for a total of [REDACTED]. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 41 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ The Special offering for the beautification with flowers of our parish church for the forthcoming feasts of the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem, Passion Week and the glorious Resurrection will be taken on Sunday, April 10. Please plan on being generous with your offering.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Louis Pasquino, +Paul Szmaida, Debra Szmaida, George Idromenos, Kent Pasquino, Kyle Pasquino, Bob Gorbich, Anna Zacharyczuk and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of [REDACTED] from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.



+++ The monthly Pirohi Sale will take place this coming Saturday. Preparations will be made Thursday morning. Please come and offer your helping hands to achieve success for the good of the parish. We are in need of orders. Halushki, pagach and cookies will also be available.

+++ This coming Sunday at 9: 15 AM, we will celebrate a Memorial Service for the repose of the soul of our beloved +Metropolitan Nicholas. We pray the merciful Lord comfort his family and beloved communicants of our diocese in their loss as we ask for blessed repose of the soul of +Metropolitan Nicholas that our gracious God create for him Eternal Memory!

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals ~~15,000~~ **\$15,000**. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.

+++ Please be certain to see **Helen Karpiak** or a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5250.00 on this project to date!

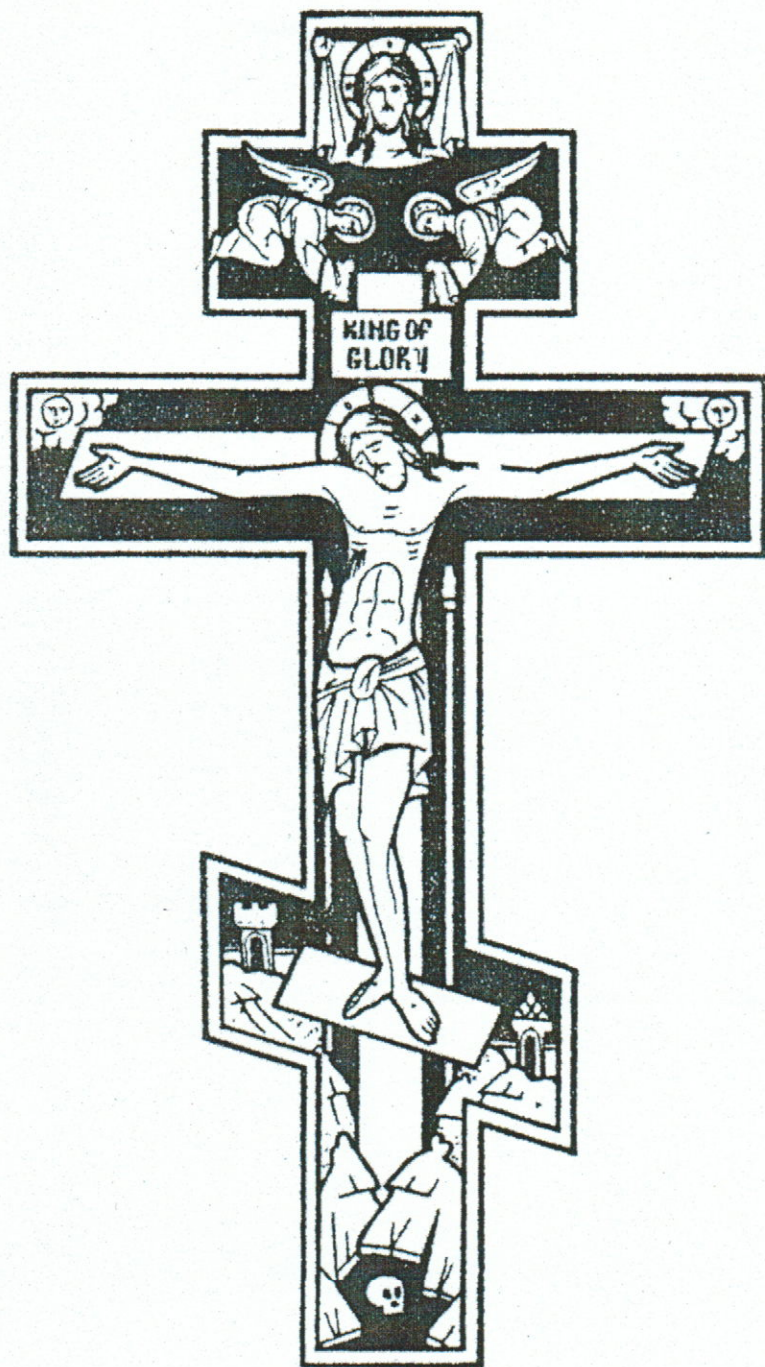
+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.

+++ We remind our faithful only those who are present for the entire Divine Liturgy should come forward to receive Communion. The entire Liturgy means "Amen" to "Amen."

+++ Some of the bulletins which were not able to be distributed because of the copy machine break down are available on the desk in the vestibule.

+++ Those who have from time to time taken food home from the church in either plastic kitchen containers or on the aluminum trays, please return them as we note a number of the containers are missing and eight trays are no longer around.

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!







### SCRIPTURAL INSPIRATION

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17*

*Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have life, they also testify on my behalf. John 5:39*

*First you must understand this: there is no prophecy contained in Scripture which is a personal interpretation. Prophecy has never been put forward by man's willing it. It is rather that men impelled by the Holy Spirit have spoken under God's influence. 2 Peter 1:20, 21*

*Anyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on rock. When the rainy season set in, the torrents came and the winds blew and buffeted his house. It did not collapse; it had been solidly set on rock. Matthew 7:24, 25*

*Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words already has his judge, namely, the word I have spoken; it is that which will condemn him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own; no, the Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to speak. Since I know that his commandment means eternal life, whatever I say is spoken just as he instructed me. John 12:48-50*

*I solemnly assure you, the man who hears my word and has faith in him who sent me possesses eternal life. He does not come under condemnation, but has passed from death to life. John 5:24*

*Every word of God is tested; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Add nothing to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be exposed as a deceiver. Proverbs 30:5, 6*



# **WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE**

*Save Your people, O Lord, and bless Your inheritance; grant victory to Your Church over her enemies, and protect Your people with Your Cross*  
**Troparion, Third Sunday of the Great Fast.**

*No longer does the flaming sword guard the gates of Eden, for on them one finds the most glorious seal, the tree of the Cross. By it, the sorrow of death and the victory of the Abyss have been conquered, for You, O my Saviour, stood up and called out to those in the Abyss: "Enter again into paradise"*  
**Kontakion, Third Sunday of the Great Fast.**

*We bow to Your Cross, O Lord, and we praise Your holy Resurrection*  
**Hymn instead of "Holy God", Third Sunday of the Great Fast.**

*Rejoice, O live-giving Cross of the Lord, Paradise of the Church and new Tree of life, who bring us the joy of unending glory. Through you, the hosts of demons are driven back; in you, the angels in heaven rejoice; and for you, the assemblies of believers are now keeping the feast. O invincible weapon and impenetrable stronghold, pride of bishops and scepter of kings, grant that we may now contemplate the Passion of Christ, and His holy Resurrection*  
**Vesper Hymn, Third Sunday of the Great Fast.**

*Seeing You, the Creator of the universe, hanging naked on the Cross, all creation was shaken with fear; the sun hid its rays and the rocks split asunder; the earth trembled and the veil of the temple was torn in two; the dead arose from their tombs, and the powers on high were struck with awe and said: O, what wonder! Behold, the Judge undergoes judgment and freely endures His passion for the salvation and restoration of the world*  
**Vesper Hymn, Third Sunday of the Great Fast.**

*Come, let us all sing a new song to celebrate the defeat of hell; for coming from the tomb, Christ has broken the power of death and saved the world. Come, let us all draw in faith, not from the fountain of corruption, but from the source of light; let us venerate the Cross of Christ in Whom we are glorified. As we venerate the Cross, which Moses formerly prefigured with his hands, we put the spiritual Amalek to flight. O Christ, our Master, and we ourselves are saved.*  
**Matins Hymn, Third Sunday of the Great Fast.**



## ON FASTING

*The Disciple:* If a person overcomes all obstacles and enters into the spiritual arena, what is the beginning of the struggle against sin? Where does the fighter start fighting?

*St. Isaac:* Everyone knows this one thing: all struggle against sin and evil desires begins by the labor of fasting. This is especially true if a person is fighting against inward sins. The sign that a person really hates sin and all wicked desires, which is clearly visible in those who are engaged in the unseen warfare, is that they begin by fasting.

The person who loves fasting is a friend of chastity. Just as sexual pleasure and the pleasures of sleep which incites lustful cohabitation is the root of all carnal sins, with all wickedness that comes from such sins, so the beginning of the holy way of God and the path to all virtues is founded upon fasting and strict adherence to the service of God.

Fasting is the strengthening of all virtues, the beginning of spiritual warfare, the beauty of virginity and sanctity, the preservation of chastity, the beginning of the way of Christianity, the father of prayer, the fountain of peacefulness, the teacher of inner quiet, the forerunner of all good qualities. As sound eyes search for pure light, so the practice of fasting with discernment leads to the desire for prayer. As soon as a person begins to fast, his mind is immediately drawn to communion with God. A fasting body cannot endure laying around in idleness. For fasting naturally leads to vigilance for God, not only by day, but also by night. And the fasting body does not grow fatigued in the struggle against sleep, for though the senses are weakened, the mind is awakened to God in

prayer. It is better to neglect some work for the weakness caused by fasting than to neglect the same work on account of laziness brought on by overeating.

It is not necessary to dwell on the beauties of fasting. Many teachers and fathers have spoken about the victories brought about by fasting and many beautiful things come from it. All the books inform us about the importance of fasting and the victories that have been won through it from generation to generation. They all tell of the mighty help which it brings and the high praises which those who use it deserve, since by experience, it is known to everyone that it is the source of everything good.

As long as man's mouth is sealed by fasting his mind will meditate on the repentance of his soul. Evil desires go far from him. Holy sadness is on his face. For there has never been seen a person fasting with discernment who is subjected to evil lusts. For fasting is a storehouse of all virtues. He who despises it makes all virtues flee.

The first commandment given to our nature in the beginning was the fasting from food and in this the head of our race, Adam, fell. Those who wish to attain to fear of God, therefore, should begin to build where the building was first fallen. They should begin with the commandment to fast. Our Saviour Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He manifested Himself at His baptism in the Jordan began from this very point. For being baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness where He fasted for forty days and nights. All who follow in His steps begin as He began, basing the start of their struggles in this action. This



weapon was given by our God. Who can despise it without being worthy of blame? If the Lawgiver fasted, which keeper of the law can fail to do likewise?

When fasting fails, the person grows sleepy, the body grows heavy, the shoulders slacken, the mind becomes dull. The person feels the compulsion to give up his work, having great aversion to those things which strengthen the soul. The spirit turns cold and dark, the mind becomes frustrated and confused. Gloom covers the entire soul. Great depression and dejection concerning all godly labors follow. One doesn't feel like reading the Bible. All necessary things are neglected. One's thoughts tumble to and fro. The mind is blunted by wandering all over the place.

Impure thoughts invade the intellect. Filthy fantasies infect our thoughts, especially during sleep consisting in sordid representations and voluptuous images which cling to the soul and incite it in shameful deeds. Such are fruits that come forth from a full stomach. For he who provides his body with many things reduces his soul to abject poverty.

He who despises fasting will be weak and without vigor in all good works, because he lacks the weapon by which all god-like athletes have attained their victory.

From a sermon by St. Isaac the Syrian.

## PRODIGALS APLENTY

The parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us about the freedom of our God to choose whom He will, and about the attitude for which the elder brother is rebuked and corrected by a tender loving father. Over and again in the Scripture, the unlikely one gets chosen and receives approbation over the more likely, obvious one. Cain was the first born of Adam and Eve, yet Abel's sacrifice was pleasing to God. Ishmael was Abraham's first born son, yet he had to give way to Isaac. Esau was older than Jacob, yet he lost his birthright to his younger brother. Joseph of Old Testament renown, was his father's favorite, making his older brothers jealous. So they sold him into slavery. Later, once again by God's choice, Joseph became master of his brothers. Saul was the least likely candidates for the kingdom of Israel, but he was God's choice. He himself was rejected as king because of jealousy. David was so unlikely a choice to succeed Saul, that when the prophet was looking for one whom God had chosen, his father did not even bother to call him home to make an introduction and presentation. Our God refers to Israel, His chosen people, as His first-born, yet it is the Gentiles, the non-believers, the second-born, who accepted His Son Jesus Christ.

We all like to think we are the ones who have been elected or selected and now have it made. But like the older brother of the Prodigal Son, or like Saul in the Old Testament, we can become jealous or envious, or better, small-hearted and of little or limited soul. When we are small hearted, we despise others just for being different or unworthy or riffraff, or just plain common sinners. The Pharisees and the scribes criticized Jesus for associating with that sort of people. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

There is no question our Lord still continues to welcome sinners who come home repentant, just like the Father welcomed home his Prodigal Son. Jesus even seeks out sinners and relieves them of their guilt if they are sorry and repentant. We ought always to associate ourselves with the Saviour when we do as He did.



## St. Andrew Of Crete

In the society in which we live today, there are few, if any standards or models which we can look up to and follow. To the faithful believer, the only icon we can follow is Christ the Saviour. The Church, knowing that we are sometimes slothful and easily hope in our pilgrimage journey in becoming Christ-like, offers us the saints as examples to follow.

Saints are Christians who have "*fought the good fight*," who have run the race and have received the incorruptible crown. The Church venerates them not only because they led their lives in holiness, but also to inspire us, to awaken in us a desire to be one in Christ. They are souls who gave evidence of being possessed by the Holy Spirit Who directed the innermost promptings of their lives.

St. Andrew of Crete is one whom the Church recognizes as having received the incorruptible crown from the Lord. His feast is celebrated on July 4. He was born in the year 660 and is known for his contribution to Church hymnography and the development of the liturgical canon. He developed this type of hymnography for the monastic life at Sabbas Monastery near Jerusalem. After his ten years at St. Sabbas, he became a deacon at the great church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He also headed a home for the orphaned and elderly. Later, between 700 and 715, he was consecrated Archbishop of Gortyna in Crete where he became widely known for his eloquent preaching. He died there about the year 740.

The Canon itself is usually composed of nine odes. Each ode consists of a canticle, an hirmos, a refrain and troparia. The canticle is the biblical hymn sung at the beginning of the ode. The hirmos is the first stanza which is based usually on the canticle and related to it; the refrain is a short response hymn sung at the end of each stanza. The troparia follow and they are reflections of the meaning of the biblical event sung in the canticle.

St. Andrew's most significant work is known as the *Great Canon*. It is prescribed to be sung on the Wednesday of the fifth week of the Great Fast and on the first four days of the Great Fast when it is divided into four portions. Its use, unfortunately, has been neglected since our arrival in America, but in Europe it is a popularly expected devotion. In the latinization process of past decades, because of its length, shorter western devotions took its place in the liturgical life of the Church.

"*The Great Canon*," as one noted liturgist expresses it, "*is St. Andrew's conversation with his soul*." However, it really is an in-depth look at our own sinful state. By a careful examination of the fall of



Adam, we see how it actually is our own personal fall as well. Through Biblical narratives contained in this *Great Canon*, we can see how much sin actually permeates our own souls and bodies. Yet it is through this careful and close scrutiny that we can be led by the grace of the Holy Spirit to humility and ultimately to Christ our Saviour. A Byzantine theologian explains:

*...the purpose of the Great Canon is to reveal sin to us and lead us thus to repentance, not by definitions and enumerations but by deep meditation on each biblical story which indeed is a story of sin, repentance, and forgiveness.*

It is only through a true examination of one's relationship to Christ and one's sinfulness that one can even begin his journey back to Christ. The *Great Canon* of St. Andrew of Crete gives a close look at our sinful state. It is the spirit of close and serious self-examination that sets the tone for the journey in the Great Fast.

These are but some of the reason our blessed Church venerates St. Andrew of Crete. His contribution to the hymnography of the Church and his holiness are inspiring for all. We can likewise look to the saints for assistance as well as spiritual direction. As beacons of light illuminating a darkened path, the saints shed the light of Christ on our own long and narrow path to the kingdom of our Eternal Father. No matter how far we may have wandered from His chosen path, we need only look to the saints who also strayed at times, yet inevitably found their way back to the path and received the incorruptible crown of acknowledged sainthood. St. Andrew of Crete, pray to God for us sinners!

## SINGLE

I am not your typical single person. I am more than forty years old and still live at home with my widowed mother. Being single was not at all my plan for life. While growing up, I had a dream and a plan for my future. I wanted to marry a wonderful Orthodox Christian man and be a faithful helpmate to him as we lived our faith commitment and served the Lord together. I wanted to have children and enjoy times of interaction with relatives and friends. I wanted a full time career as a wife and mother. But that has not happened yet.

As the years have passed, I have watched friends, relatives, even my younger sister marry. People have tried to encourage me: "*Just be patient, your 'prince' will come.*" They tell me, "*God will provide the right man to complete your life.*" These words often hurt me more than they help.



As I began my twenties, I had a strong faith that my dream would come true in the near future. When my thirties came along, I questioned God, and my doubts increased. Did God know that my biological clock was ticking? Was something wrong with me? Had I missed God's will somewhere? Now that I'm in my forties, wrestling with the possibility of spending my life as a single woman has become more difficult. The reality of my singleness is difficult to accept.

Perhaps some Christians react to me by thinking, *"What a poor, unhappy, bitter, and depressed woman!"* But the truth is, I am not! Though at times I have feelings like that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I do not let them rule or ruin my life. People may say, *"I'm going to pray for the right man for you."* But my response is, "Don't" These words remind me that my dream has not yet been realized. They tell me that the speaker thinks that marriage will fulfill my life. These words simply imply that the speaker has not at all considered that our God may intend for me to be single.

How do I deal with my broken dreams and plans? When I am depressed, God brings me back to basic reality: Do I believe He is sovereign? Do I believe that He loves and cares for me and knows what is best for my life? Do I believe that He has a plan and a purpose for me now, and that He will take care of me in the future?

As a child, I was fortunate to grow up in a believing family and daily I have made a commitment to offer my entire life and being to Christ, to follow, trust, and obey Him. So, I have learned, many times the hard way, that God provides for all my needs. *"My God will in turn supply your needs fully, in a way worthy of his magnificent riches in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:19) Of course, I understand He will offer me not necessarily my wants or my dreams and desires, but that His grace is sufficient in difficult hours. *"He said to me, 'My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection' And so I willingly boast of my weaknesses instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* (2 Corinthians 12:9) My desire has become the same as that of St. Paul and I grasp what he meant. *"The virgin, indeed, any unmarried woman on the other hand, is concerned with things of the Lord, in pursuit of holiness in body and spirit."* (1 Corinthians 7:34)

My goal is to be content in soul with whatever marital status the Lord provides for me and submit to His will, even though many times I do not understand. *"I do not say this because I am in want, for whatever the situation I find myself in I have learned to be self-sufficient. I am experienced in being brought low, yet I know what it is to have in abundance. I have learned to cope with every circumstance, how to eat well or go hungry, to be well provided for or do without. In him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

I am not in a holding pattern waiting for marriage; but I am striving to reach a place where I do know that God is all I need, regardless of outward circumstances. Perhaps my dream of marriage will not become a reality. But I have a desire that is greater than my dream. It is to be single in my loyalty to my Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ; single in my faith commitment that God is sovereign and knows what is best for me, that His Holy Spirit will teach, guide, and strengthen me in my present opportunities; single in my purpose to offer my life as a living sacrifice to honor and glorify Him!



## VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

St. Paul says of the Cross: *"For the Jews demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a scandal, to the Greeks, foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 1: 24). Today we venerate the life-giving Cross of our Saviour. It must be brought to our attention afresh because we grow weary in penitential devotions during this season of the Great Fast. Our blessed Church wants to revive our devotion and our zeal. So the Holy Cross is brought before us, in a place of honor and dignity, in the very center of our place of worship, so that we may easily approach it and venerate its sacred wood because of what it witnesses to in our salvation. It is sanctified and glorified by the Blood of Christ, the price of our redemption. The early Fathers of the Church of Christ tell the story of the devil speaking and saying, *"Three things I fear in Christians: that in which they bathe (baptism); that which nourishes them in church (the Eucharist); and that which they wear around their necks (the cross).*

The life-giving wood of the Cross of Christ repels the devil and saves us. The Cross we must take up and carry ourselves if we will be saved. It is only through the Cross that we enter into and share in the victorious Resurrection of Christ.

The Cross of Christ is really a plus sign, the greatest positive sign this world has ever known. It is the Father's plus sign for each believer. It means that our God offers us great plusses as we advance in life towards complete redemption in Christ. We are not alone with our difficulties because we have the great plus of God's presence and grace, His guidance, His direction and wisdom. Sinful man plus God's mercy equals forgiveness. Confused man plus Christ equals new purpose, new meaning, a totally new person. Guilt-ridden man plus Christ equals *"the peace of God that passes all understanding."* Weak man plus Christ equals strength unknown before. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Despairing man plus Christ equals hope. The Cross was not the end for Jesus; neither will it be the end for those who believe in Him. The Risen Christ will have the last word. And the last word is: *"In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

The Cross is central to Byzantine Christianity because without the Cross, there is no Resurrection. We preach Christ crucified and risen! We are not simply the faith of the Resurrection, but the religion of the Cross as well. It is from the Cross that joy has come to the world. But before we can have the victor's crown of glory, we must endure the Cross, we must carry our Cross, and we must permit ourselves to be transformed by the power of the Cross. We must recognize we are under the dominion of God's rule of love. So we are eager today to bow down and venerate the sacred wood, the symbol of our salvation, the ladder to heaven. *"We bow to Your Cross, O Lord, and we praise Your holy Resurrection!"*



## THE CROSS: THE CHURCH'S "RUDDER"

**I**n the symbolism of our Holy Orthodox Faith, the Church is often compared to a ship, carrying us through the turbulent ocean of life to our ultimate destination: God's heavenly kingdom. Church buildings themselves are sometimes constructed in a manner that resembles a seafaring vessel. Christ is our "captain" on our journey in life, and if indeed the Church is a "ship" then it must certainly have a rudder, for without this important instrument, it would be virtually impossible to navigate it and keep it on a proper course.

Today, we commemorate the 3rd Sunday of the Great Fast, which is designated as "Cross Veneration Sunday." In effect, we are reminded on this day that our "rudder" is the Cross. The Cross is our constant sign of hope. When life's problems overwhelm us, we are comforted by it. When we forget how much God loves us, it points out the abundance of that love. When we wonder what path to travel in life, it teaches us that only by taking up our OWN cross can we expect to find ourselves worthy of eternal life.

As we bow down before the Cross today, let us call to mind the writing of St. Ephrem the Syrian concerning this "instrument of our salvation": *"The Cross is the Resurrection of the dead. The Cross is a staff for the lame. The Cross is the consolation of the poor. The Cross is the dethronement of the proud. The Cross is the hope of the hopeless. The Cross is the harbor of the storm-tossed. The Cross is the comfort of the afflicted. The Cross is the protector of youth. The Cross is the crown of the aged. The Cross is the bread of the hungry and the fountain of the thirsty."* Yes, wherever we find the Cross, there we will find strength, victory and salvation!

The Orthodox Weekly Bulletin . . . . . Vestal, Cliffwood, New Jersey . . . . . Litho in U.S.A.