

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2023  
VENERATION OF THE CROSS SUNDAY**

**MARK 8:34-9:1**

**“GOD SAID IT ALL---ON THE CROSS”**

Some sceptics might say----“If God exists, why doesn’t He just clearly show Himself to us? Then we would *know* whether or not there is a God. And we would know what He is really like. Why doesn’t He just show Himself to us?” He did.

On the cross on Great and Holy Friday, God showed Himself to us. He fully revealed to us what He is like. On the cross, God said it all. Because of that, we know what He is like.

And that leads to this question-----As Christians, what should we be like? The Bible tells us over and over again to be godly, to be like God, to be like Christ who is God. That is our calling as people of Jesus Christ----to become more and more godly day by day in this life. And if we wish to become more like God, then the cross is for us, too.

St. Paul in Romans 6, the epistle lesson for all Orthodox baptisms, said that in baptism we are united to both Christ’s death and resurrection. Going down into the water physically shows us what is happening----union with Christ’s death. Coming back up out of the water also physically shows us what is happening---union with Christ’s resurrection. And that union with Christ that begins at baptism is something we need to live out every day. We need to live in the cross so that we can live in the resurrection.

Living in the cross of Christ, carrying our own cross, means being like Christ was on the cross: self-sacrificing, pouring ourselves out for others

The cross shows us that God is a God who does not sit high and mighty on a throne far away. He is a God who came down here in Christ to pour Himself out for us, especially by dying in agony on the cross. So to be godly, to be like God, we should live lives of self-sacrifice, pouring ourselves out for others, not living for ourselves. We should follow the example of Jesus on the cross.

Holy Week is not considered by us to be part of Lent. So for we Orthodox,

we are exactly half-way through Lent today, on Veneration of the Cross Sunday. Lent is a good time to think about how we can pour ourselves out and follow Christ's example.

Of course, there are many ways to do that. I'll speak about two.....

**FIRST**----Is there someone you don't get along with very well? They irritate you, rub you the wrong way-----you like to avoid them if possible. This person could be a neighbor or someone at work or school, someone here at church. It could be a relative. Whoever it is, be godly, be like Christ: pour yourself out for them.

It may need to start in very little ways—just putting on a smile when you encounter them, a friendly greeting instead of avoidance, a kind little gesture. And if that works, you can go further at getting along well. It can work if you put yourself into it.

St. John the Almsgiver was Patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt in the 600's A.D. So many wonderful stories about him; he must have been quite a character. By God's mercy, if we meet him above someday he would be great to visit with! One story is about a liturgy he was serving in his cathedral. (Just a liturgical note----apparently back then in Egypt bishops went around the nave in the Great Entrance unlike how it became later-----where bishops wait up in front for the priests to bring up the Holy Gifts, the bread and wine that will become Christ's Body and Blood.)

St. John is about to begin the Great Entrance and while still in the altar, he notices that one of his priests is absent. He asks another priest why and is told that the missing priest is angry at the bishop about something and refuses to come in the church—he's standing outside near the door. St. John is very saddened but decides to begin the Great Entrance anyway. So as he and the priests and the servers walk through the nave and come to the back of the church, the bishop asks everyone to quit singing for just a second. He hands the chalice and diskos to a priest, tells him to wait on that spot and says to the singers that he has to go outside for a few minutes---they should just keep singing the hymn until he returns!

So the people sing while he goes outside and there sees the angry priest. The Saint falls on the ground before the priest and begs forgiveness for however he has hurt or offended him. The priest breaks down and weeps and asks the bishop to forgive him---they are reconciled and embrace. Then they go into the church and the priest joins in what is left of the Great Entrance---and all is well. Except maybe the people's voices because they kept repeating the hymn while all this went on! (Fr. Bill Olhhausen, St. Nicholas Orthodox

Church newsletter, January 20, 2003)

This kind of thing can be risky. You might get rejected! If so, just forgive and look for *another* opportunity to improve the situation. It may not be easy, but pour yourself out for that person you don't really like!

**SECOND**---Do you know someone who needs help? Maybe an elderly person you know, a neighbor, someone at work, someone in our parish....Pour yourself out for them. Different ways this could be done because of different circumstances..... Maybe just a phone call.... Maybe giving a ride somewhere. Maybe an anonymous cash gift to help with some crisis. Maybe just being a friend. Little things like that can help big time. Because it helps someone realize they are not alone!

We are all so busy, that this can be difficult to do. Helping others may be stressful. But then look at an icon of the crucifixion of Christ---very stressful! So be like the Lord and do something to help someone who can use your help. Follow the Lord's example---pour yourself out!

So as we enter today the second half of Lent, give some thought about how we can follow Christ's example. How can we pour ourselves out like He did?

God wants us to be like Him, to be godly. And we know what God is like every time we look at a cross. On the cross, He most clearly revealed Himself.

And if we wish to be like Him, to be godly, that means a cross for us, too. As the Lord said in today's gospel reading, Mark 8:34—"If any would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Let us strive, with God's grace and mercy and help, to be godly. May we take up our own crosses and pour ourselves out for God and for those in our lives.