

WE MUST VENERATE THE CROSS

—by *St. Gregory Palamas*—

Not only the word and mystery of the Cross are divine and to be revered, but also its sign. For it is a holy, saving, and venerable seal, able to hallow and perfect all the good, marvelous, and indescribable things which God has done for the human race. It can take away the curse and the condemnation, destroy corruption and death, bestow eternal life and grant blessing. It is the wood of salvation, the regal scepter, the divine trophy of victory over visible and invisible enemies, even though the heretics' followers are insanely displeased. Unfortunately, they have not attained to the Apostle's prayer that **“they might be able to comprehend with the saints what is the breadth, and length, and height and depth” (Eph. 3:18)**. They have not understood that the Lord's Cross discloses the entire dispensation of His coming in the flesh, and that it contains within itself the whole mystery of His dispensation. Extending in all directions, it embraces everything above, below, around and in between. The heretics abhor the sign of the King of Glory (**Ps. 24:7-10**), putting forward an excuse, in accordance with which, if they were reasonable, they ought to reverence the Cross along with us. The Lord Himself, when He was going to ascend the Cross, openly referred to it as His lifting up and His glory: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even **so must the Son of Man be lifted up**” (**Jn. 3:14**); “The hour has come **for the Son of Man to be glorified**” (**Jn. 12:23**). Furthermore, He announced that when He comes again and manifests Himself, this sign of the Son of Man will come with power and great glory: “And then shall appear **the sign of the Son of Man in heaven** ... and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven **with power and great glory**” (**Mt. 24:30**).

The heretics say that because Christ died nailed to the Cross, they cannot bear to see the form of the wood on which He was put to death. But where was the handwriting, which was drawn up against us because of our disobedience when our forefather stretched out his hand to the tree, nailed? How was it removed and obliterated, enabling us to return to God's blessing? Where did Christ despoil and completely drive away the principalities and powers of the evil spirits, which had taken hold of our nature since the time of the tree of disobedience? Where did He triumph over them and put them to shame, so that we could be set free? How was the middle wall of partition broken down, and our enmity towards God abolished and put to death? By what means were we reconciled with God, and how did we hear the Good News of peace with Him? Surely it was on

the Cross and by means of the Cross. Let those who doubt listen to what the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians: “For Christ is our peace, who hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body **by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby [i.e., through the Cross]**” (Eph. 2:14-16). To the Colossians he writes, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, **nailing it to His Cross**; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them **in it [i.e., the Cross]**” (Col. 2:13-15).

Surely, we should honor and use this divine trophy of freedom for the whole human race. Its appearance alone puts the serpent, the originator of evil, to flight, triumphs over him and disgraces him, proclaiming him defeated and crushed. It glorifies and magnifies Christ, and displays His victory to the world. If it were really necessary to disregard the Cross because Christ suffered death on it, then His death too would be neither honorable nor salutary. But then why have we been baptized into His death, as the Apostle tells us (**Rom. 6:3**)? And how will we share in His Resurrection, if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death (**Rom. 6:5**)? If someone were to reverence the sign of the Cross without the Lord's name written on it, he could justly be accused of doing something incorrect. However, since “**At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow**, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth” (**Phil. 2:10**), and since the Cross bears this venerable name, how very foolish not to bow the knee at Christ's Cross!

Inclining our hearts as well as bending our knees, come, “**let us worship**,” with David the Psalmist and Prophet, “**at the place where His feet stood**” (**Ps. 132:7**), where His all-embracing hands were outspread, and His life-giving Body was stretched out for our sake. As we reverence and greet the Cross with faith, let us draw and keep the abundant sanctification flowing from it. Then, at the sublimely glorious future Advent of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, as we see Him come in glory, we shall rejoice and jump for joy unceasingly, having attained to a place on His right hand and heard the promised joyful words and blessing, to the glory of the Son of God crucified in the flesh for us.

For to Him belongs all glory, together with His Father without beginning, and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.