

CONCERNING THE FEAST OF THE ELEVATION OF THE CROSS ON THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

—by Saint Nektarios of Pentapolis—

The finding of the Venerable Cross and nails by Saint Helen, and the Elevation of the Cross by Patriarch Makarios of Jerusalem that took place in 326 AD is celebrated on the Third Sunday of Great Lent

The feast of the finding of the venerable Cross and the nails used to crucify Christ was originally commemorated by the Orthodox Church on March 6th, as recorded in the *Synaxarion*. Immediately after the Cross was found, Saint Makarios, who was the Patriarch of Jerusalem at the time, ascended upon a raised platform, from where he raised the Cross before the multitudes, in order for all the people to see and venerate the Cross of the Lord. Since the elevation of the Cross took place the same day it was found, the feast of the Elevation of the Cross would also be celebrated on March 6th. Today, the Church's liturgical books still state that these events took place on March 6th; however, the Church does not celebrate these events in a festive manner on that day.

The reason the Church ceased celebrating the elevation of the Cross on March 6th is this: When Pascha falls on April 3rd, March 6th coincides with the Third Sunday of Great Lent. With this in mind, the holy fathers, who have ordered all things very well, deemed it would be good for the feast of the finding of the venerable Cross to always be celebrated on the Third Sunday of Lent, in order to provide strength and solace (according to the explanation given in the book of the *Triodion*) to the Christians who struggle to acquire virtue during the lengthy fast of Great Lent. In other words, this feast day was moved to the Third Sunday of Lent every year, regardless of whether or not this Sunday falls on March 6th. This is similar to what happened with the feast days of Saint Gregory Palamas, Saint John of the Ladder, and Saint Mary of Egypt, which were moved from their original dates to the Sundays within Great Lent, in order to provide a brilliant example of encouragement and support for the Christians keeping the fast, who congregate in the churches predominantly on Sundays.

On account of the aforementioned, I am of the opinion that on the Third Sunday of Great Lent we are actually celebrating the finding of the venerable Cross by Saint Helen; and this is the reason why the finding of the venerable Cross ceased being celebrated on March 6th.