

### *The Fourth Week of Great Lent*

"This is a holy week of light, in which the precious Cross is exalted in the sight of all the world". During all this week up to Saturday "sanctifying the time of abstinence the divine and precious Cross" in the midst of the temple "clearly offers everything, source of divine forgiveness, both light of heaven and life and true joyfulness", "bestowing on those who venerate it redemptive sanctification, light and glory and mercy" and "facilitating the season of the Fast for us". The subject of the church hymns all this week is the glorification of the Holy Cross, and therefore it is referred to as Veneration of the Cross Week 1). Representing beneficial fruits sprouting from the life-creating tree of the Cross into a sinful world, the Holy Church sings praises to the Holy Cross, as "a tree of life, the spoiler of Hades, the joy of the world and the consumer of corruption", "the scepter of the Holy Messiah, the heavenly glory of man, the praise of kings, the dominion of faith, the invincible weapon, the driving away of enemies, the light of radiance, the salvation of the world, the great glory of martyrs, the power of the righteous, the brightness of angels", "the sign of joy, the praise of martyrs, the adornment of apostles, the confirmation of bishops", "the joy of the Orthodox, the protector of the universe", "the fortress of abstinence, the cooperator of the vigilant, the strengthening of the fasters, the upholders of the strugglers". Praising the Holy Cross, the Holy Church together with it calls on its children to restrain "from corrupting passions for food by abstinence and from sweets by disgust", and "purifying themselves by fasting" to venerate the Holy Cross "with awe and by faith", "drawing up sanctification for their souls". But as success in the Lenten spiritual efforts may, especially after having already achieved the mid point of the holy Forty Day Fast be eclipsed by gluttony, the Holy Church following the example of the Lord, who humbled Himself by dying on the cross, also calls us to humility, so that we may not lose our justification before God because of Pharisaic pride, looking not only at our deeds, but also in our thoughts. "Let us with all the faithful, the Holy Church appeals to us, emulate the repentance of the Publican, and not boast like the Pharisee. Let us offer cries of sorrow from the depth of our heart to the loving God of all. For He Himself has given this commandment saying: Every man that exalts himself shall be abased, and that he that humbles himself shall be exalted. Therefore with one accord let us cry to Him: God be merciful to us sinners and save us" and "grant us that it may come during the rest of the fasting season in tenderness".

On the fourth week there is **a veneration of the Holy Cross** on those days, which the Holy Church, for the most part, calls for prayer and fasting: on Monday and Wednesday, at the First Hour, and on Friday, at the end of all the Hours. The priest sets the analogion with the Holy Cross, and places a candleholder with

lighted candles behind the analogion, and the priest sings: "**Before Thy Cross**", and so forth, as this is done on Sunday. At the First Hour instead of the prayer: "Order my steps", we sing: "Before Thy Cross", and after that, during the veneration, we sing the verses: "Come, faithful, and let us venerate", with those verses that we sing at the veneration of the cross on the Veneration of the Cross Sunday. The veneration of the cross is done even if it is the patronal feast day.

**Wednesday** of the fourth week is called the "middle" of the Holy Forty Day Fast (in simple language it is "Middle of the Cross Week"). From this Wednesday on at the Presanctified Liturgies we intone the special litany for the catechumens as written in the service books "On this Mid-Fast Wednesday we do not use olive oil and wine for our meals, for again the day is mournful and not joyful".

We sing all the services on Friday the same way as on Wednesday. At the dismissal for the Hours there is a veneration of the **Cross** during the singing of the idiomelon (samoglasnikh) verses (stichera); after the veneration of the Cross, the Cross is carried into the sanctuary according to the rubrics as on August 2 (see page 268).

Note:

1) Some of the hymns for this week of the Holy Cross are called "thrice composed" and "tripartite" (look at the 8<sup>th</sup> ode of the canon for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday). In the opinion of some, the name of Holy Cross is explained by the following tradition "about the tree of the cross". The Patriarch Abraham, wishing to find out whether the Lord will forgive the heavy sin of Lot (Gen 19:30-38), planted three saplings from three healthy trees: the cypress, the plane tree (i. e. a date palm) and the cedar (again ode 5 of the canon for Friday of the fourth week of Great Lent, ode 5 of the Resurrection canon and ode 9 of the canon for Wednesday of the Octoechos tone 2 and the tone 3 Kathisma (sedalen) for Matins on Wednesday and Friday) and ordered Lot to carry water from the Jordan and to water these saplings. Abraham thought to himself, that if the designated branches starts to grow, then God will forgive Lot, and if not, the sin of Lot is not forgiven. Lot fervently fulfilled the obedience (podvig) of sincere penance laid on him. The tempter of the human race the devil, seeing the unceasing labor of Lot, perpetrated all kinds of obstacles to not allow him to water the three entrusted branches. The penitential effort overcame the intrigues of the tempter. The plentifully watered branches grew. Moreover, they grew together into one tree. From this one, but three-sourced tree the arms of the cross of crucifixion was subsequently made, on which the Savior was crucified (see the details in the *Kormchii* 1896, 8).

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p. 0521-2  
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