

HOMILY – On the Holy Cross (August 1, 2021)
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There are two ways of looking at the Cross of Our Lord:

1: This is what the world did to Our Lord.

For His goodness and kindness, His teaching and preaching, His miracles of healing:

Unlawful arrest * Unjust Trial * Inhumane Imprisonment * Criminal Crucifixion

Betrayal by Judas * Abandonment by Apostles * Denial by Peter

Lashings – Crown of Thorns – Nails – Spear

Shouts of Sanhedrin * Cries of Crowd * Jeers of Passers-By * Wailing of Women

The sun hid its face in shame; curtain of the Temple tore in two in terror; the earth quaked and the rocks rebelled, at what the creatures had done to their Creator.

Our response: shock and shame; sadness and sorrow.

2: This is what Our Lord did for us.

We all know the famous piece of Scripture:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son . . ." (John 3:16)

This had been God's plan since the time of Adam . . .

His Son would do what Adam had failed to do . . . obey God perfectly

His Son would undo the consequences of Adam's sin: suffering, Death, Hades

But God would have to give His Son over to suffering, Death and Hades

What kind of God did the Jews have? The Talmud (the Jewish commentary on the Old Testament) tells that a non-believer asked the Jews what kind of God they had -- Who would promise an old man (Abraham) a son, give him Isaac, and then ask him to sacrifice the boy to that God.

The rabbis answered, But it was only a test. When the Lord saw that Abraham was willing to obey, He stopped the sacrifice of Abraham's son ... and an animal was offered in his place.

What kind of God do we Christians have? Our God offered His only-begotten Son to be sacrificed on the Cross for our sins -- and even though His Son obeyed Him and accepted to offer His life as a ransom for us -- God did not stop that Sacrifice. Because He loved us so much He allowed His Son to go through the Suffering of the Crucifixion, Death on the Cross, and the Descent into Hades -- for our sake and for our salvation. That's how much we mean to Him.

Make no mistake about it: The Son of God did this all willingly. -- He was not a victim ...

The Scripture tells us, "I lay down my life of my own accord . . . no one takes it from me." (John 10:18)

"Greater love than this has no man that he lay down his life for his friends;
you are my friends, if you keep my commandments." (John 15:13)

He said to those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them ... for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

Isaiah foresaw this and foretold it in his prophecy of the Suffering Servant:

"He bore our sins, and carried our sorrows;

He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities;

. . . and by His stripes are we healed.”

On Great and Holy Friday, we sing: “Thou who on the 6th day and hour nailed to the Cross the sin which Adam, through boldness, committed in Paradise. Tear apart the hand-writing of our transgressions, O Christ our God, and save us.”

And at the Ninth Hour: “Thou, who for our sakes at the 9th hour, tasted death in the flesh, mortify the desires of our flesh, O Christ our God, and save us.”

To suffer . . . to die . . . to descend into Sheol . . . He did it all for us.

St. Paul tells us: “One would hardly die for a sinner; perhaps one would give his life for a good man. But Christ died for us, even when we were . . . still sinners.” (Romans 5:7)

Make no mistake: He did this for you . . . From the Canon of St. Andrew we recall the long list of our sins.

In true humility we might say, with St. John Chrysostom in his Prayer before Holy Communion, quoting Saint Paul: we are “sinners . . . of whom I am the first.” (I Timothy 1:15)

Do you realize? “If you had been the only person in the world to have committed a sin, Christ still would have died on the Cross for you. He still would have gone through the same agony, suffering, passion and death that He endured for the whole world. That is how important you are as an individual soul.”

Our response: thanksgiving and love . . . repentance and a changed life.

We must leave grateful for the love He has shown us and all He has done for us. And we must not stay the same:

We cannot stay in our sins. We must repent. We must come closer to God – grow in theosis; be more and more like Christ. Do what He did; speak as He spoke; be as He was, so that we can claim for ourselves what He has achieved for our salvation. Indeed, we must not remain the same.

* How do you view the Cross of Our Lord?

· This is how St. Tikhon of Zadonsk viewed it – in his Homily on the Crucifixion.

"You lived on earth, King of Heaven, to lead me to heaven - I who had been cast out of paradise.
You were born in the flesh of the Virgin to give me birth in the spirit.
You suffered insults to silence the mouths of my enemies who denounced me.
You abased Yourself, You Who are higher than all.
You wept to wipe the tears from my eyes.
You sighed, grieved, and sorrowed to save me from sighing, grieving,
and suffering pain through eternity, to give me eternal joy and gladness.
You were sold and betrayed that I might be freed, I who was enslaved.
You were bound that my bonds might be broken.
You were submitted to an unjust trial, You Who are the Judge of all the earth,
that I might be freed from eternal judgment.
You were made naked in order to clothe me in the robes of salvation, in the garments of gladness.
You were crowned with thorns, that I might receive the crown of life.
You were called the king of mockery - You, the King of all! - to open the kingdom of heaven for me.
Your head was lashed with a reed that my name should be written in the book of life.
You suffered outside the city gates in order to lead me, one who had been cast out of paradise,
into the eternal Jerusalem.

You were put among evil men - You Who are the only Just One - that I, the unjust,
might be justified.
You were cursed, the One Blessed, that I, the accursed, should be blessed.
You shed your blood that my sins might be cleansed away.
You were given vinegar to drink, that I might eat and drink at the feast in Your Kingdom.
You died, You Who are the life of all - in order to revive me, the dead.
You were laid in the tomb that I might rise from the tomb.
You were brought to life again, that I might believe in my resurrection."
· As you look upon the Cross, what will you see and what will you say?

Will you see: This is what the world did to Christ –
Will you say, What a shame! – and walk away, shaking your head?

OR will you see: This is what Our Lord has done for us –
And say, He did this for me! He really did this for me!
And I must not stay the same!

To the One Who died upon the Cross for us and our salvation,
the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves,
be all glory, honor and worship, unto ages of ages. Amen.