

Week 3 - The Holy Cross

Objectives:

- ✚ To know why the cross is considered the symbol of Christianity.
- ✚ The effectiveness of the cross in our life.

Memory verse:

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1Corinthians 1:18).

Introduction:

The cross was the most horrible device of execution known in history among the Romans. It was used for degrading, despising and torturing criminals to death. Suddenly the cross became a symbol of dignity and pride. It was raised high over our churches, placed on the top of the church tower, the domes and on the veil of the temple. The cross is held in front of church processions. In general, the cross has become the sign, the emblem and the symbol of Christianity and Christians everywhere. What is the secret behind this change? And why does the church insist on lifting the cross up on the time before her children?

Lesson Outlines:

XXVI. The Holy Cross with reference to history

How wonderful this story is! Its brave woman was not a young girl or an ordinary woman among the people, but she was an old woman above eighty years old. When she wanted to comfort herself after her son had been killed, she

went to know the place of the Holy Tomb enduring the troubles of travel to Jerusalem. She went to the Holy Land, motivated by a vision (a dream). She felt sad when she found out that the place had fallen into ruin as it was covered with a huge hill of garbage and dust on which pagan temple was built for the goddess Venus. Queen Helen ordered her servants to demolish (pull down) the temple and to remove the dust. She found three crosses among which was the Lord's cross. She saw the notice written by Pontius Pilate on that cross. Then she also found the place of the tomb. She also found the nails with which the Lord's hands were nailed to the cross. She sent these nails to her son Constantine who fixed one of them to his royal helmet, which he used in battles. It became a custom later on for Kings to put a piece of iron in the shape of a nail on their crowns. Queen Helen sent a piece of the Cross to the Emperor's Palace in Constantinople and the remainder was put in a silver box inside the Resurrection church.

Queen Helen built a big church over the Holy Tomb and called it the New Jerusalem. She also built another church on the Cave of Nativity in Bethlehem, the modest place in which Christ was born and this church was as beautiful as the first one.

XXVII. A Cross appears in the sky

History tells us that the sign of the cross appeared in the sky several times as a pillar of light. The First Time: The Cross appeared in the sky to the Emperor Constantine together with his officers and soldiers to encourage him before starting the war. Late in the afternoon, Emperor Constantine saw the radiant sign of the cross above the sun in the sky. Inscribed upon it were the words,

“By this sign you will conquer”. That view had such a great effect on Constantine that he was converted to Christianity and waged a campaign against the tyrant Maxentius.

The cross appeared for another time as a pillar of light to all people in the sky of Jerusalem in 351 AD. It did not disappear quickly, but it remained visible for several hours. In that time it was more radiant than the sun. All the people of the city rushed out to see that sight. They were surprised and afraid but at the same time they were happy to see such a heavenly sight.

XXVIII. The Final Appearance

This will happen by the end of times when the sign of the cross covers the whole sky, east, west, north and south. At that time all the kingdoms of the earth will submit themselves to the Lord Christ.

XXIX. The Cross with reference to the Christian Dogma

The Cross embodies the greatest and most important Christian creeds. The Lord Christ tasted death on it. This proves that He has true flesh, the same as that of all people. In other words, the Cross is a proof of the Incarnation Creed. Christ fulfilled Redemption with his propitiatory death on the Cross. So the Cross emphasized the second great Christian Creed; i.e. the Redemption Creed. When the faithful make the sign of the Cross, they state and confess their faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One God. They declare their belief in the Creed of Trinity and One God, three hypostases and one essence (substance). Thus we see in the Cross the most important creeds of our holy faith.

- 🕒 The reconciliation between God and man was fulfilled through the Cross. For this reason Christ was hung between the sky and the earth to be the way for man to come back to God. He stretched out his blessed

hands to receive all those under the sky. He descended into Hades through the Cross to bring Adam and his children back to Paradise.

- ⌚ We have also been justified through the Cross. We have become innocent of the charges directed to man (as a blasphemer and evildoer). These are the same charges that were directed to the Lord and he was innocent of them all (We are now justified with his blood).
- ⌚ Through the Cross all our previous debts have been paid. The Law could not payoff these debts but it emphasized them instead: “And you, who were dead in trespasses and the un- circumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this He set aside, nailing it to the Cross” (Colossians 2:13, 14).

The Holy Cross with reference to its rite

1. In Baptism: The water is sanctified with the siGenesis of the Cross in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. St. John Chrysostom says, “Thus baptism is not only called a cross but the Cross also is called baptism” because the Cross is the baptism of blood and in baptism we die with Christ.
2. In Chrism: All our organs are circumcised with the siGenesis of the Cross 36 times (for all parts of the body).

3. In the Sacrament of Confession (Penance): The Cross is placed on the Confessor's head as a sign that his sins are forgiven with the blood of the Cross.
4. In the Sacrament of the Holy Communion: This is the blood of the Cross and the Holy Body broken for us is incarnate before our eyes.
5. In the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick: Here the oil is first sanctified by crossing it with the Cross seven times during reading the seven appropriate texts from the Gospels and by lighting seven wicks.
6. In the Sacrament of the Holy Orders: When the Cross is put on the head of the person chosen to receive the Holy Order, the person receives, through prayer and the power of the Cross, the ability to carry the Cross and to exercise the other sacraments. You may notice that the priest wears a cross and holds a cross in his hand. He puts a cross on the front of his clothes (his own cross) and a cross on the back of his clothes (the people cross).
7. In the Sacrament of Marriage (Matrimony): The married life is a series of sacrifices starting from the moment when the Cross is put on the heads of the bride and the bridegroom and ending with the Crown of Victory and the glories of resurrection.

The Cross in our Life

1. 🕒 The sign of the Cross drives away demons as it reminds them of the Devil's defeat at Golgotha.

2. 🕒 It is a cure for defiled lust and a power that quenches the flames of fire and the authority of sin.
3. 🕒 When we stretch our hands in the shape of the cross and cross our foreheads and chests, we become free from the authority of death, and we go deep into the depth of the soul through prayer like a bird stretching its wings and flying high in the sky.
4. 🕒 The Cross is also a means of triumph over temptation and a siGenesis of Salvation. The martyrs used to cross the cup offered to them with the siGenesis of the Cross.
5. 🕒 The Cross was and will remain a pride, a beauty, a crown, a weapon and declaration of faith and the irresistible power of God.

Conclusion:

- 🕒 “Through the Cross man can drive away all the deceits of the demons”(Athanasius the Apostolic).
- 🕒 “The martyr did not drink the cup before furrowing it with the siGenesis of the Cross which is the siGenesis of salvation” (Theodoreit the Historian).
- 🕒 “Our salvation is confirmed when we partake in the sacraments and their symbols. One of these symbols is the siGenesis of the Cross” (St. Gregory of Nyssa).