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‘Hail, life-bearing Cross’ (Rafael Ch. Misiaoulis)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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The Church boasts of the Precious Cross and experiences its message at every point of its worship. At every service, throughout the whole of the Church’s life, the presence of the Tree of Life is palpable.

The Precious Cross is highlighted as a source of power and life at the mid-point of Great Lent, reminding us that the path leading to our resurrection with the Risen Christ involves being crucified, according to Saint Justin Popović. If we don’t endure the Cross, we won’t reach the Resurrection.



Source: agkyriaki.gr

The Precious Cross is a weapon against the devil: ‘Lord, you have given us a weapon against the devil’, says the hymnographer . It’s the sign of the grace of God. From being a dishonourable symbol of death, in the Old Testament (‘cursed are they who are hanged on the tree’, Deuteronomy 21, 23) in the New it becomes

the symbol of victory, the life-bearing force, the invincible trophy, the firm support of our lives (Gal. 3, 13).

During the course of the forty-day fast, we, too, in a sense are crucified, by mortifying the passions, realizing the bitterness of sloth and our fallen state. This is why the precious and life-giving Cross is elevated, for our rest and recuperation, for our enlightenment and inspiration, as a reminder of the suffering of Our Lord.

The Lord wishes to tell us that His Cross is no mere symbol, but an experience, a way of life. If we live in the Cross of Christ, we have the chance to be saved, to be revived and to defeat death, as the Lord Himself did, 'trampling down death by death' as we shall sing on Easter Sunday.

But what is the Precious Cross for Orthodox Christians?

For the Orthodox, the Cross is the symbol of love and sacrifice, 'a saving sign, a life-giving sign, a sanctifying sign, a weapon of victory', as Saint Sophronios of Jerusalem calls it. Saint Gregory of Nyssa calls it the antidote to evils and Saint John Chrysostom says it is 'the chief of all good things'.

Saint Theophan the Recluse provides us with a wonderful answer to this question. He says that the Precious Cross 'is all the trials, the hindrances and sorrows, the weight of which falls on our shoulders internally and externally as we tread the path of consciously fulfilling the commandments of the Lord. Such a Cross, of these proportions, is self-evident for Christians. Wherever there's a Christian, you'll find a Cross; if there's no Cross, there's no Christian'.

The vertical part of the Cross symbolizes the love we should have for God. And God's love is so great that He sent His Son to become a sacrifice for us. The horizontal bar symbolizes the love we should have for other people. If we love God, we also love our neighbour. Today the Cross dominates the whole life of believing Christians, the whole life of our Church as an agent of sacrifice, salvation, joy, sanctification and grace. As Saint John Chrysostom writes, 'this accursed and revolting symbol of the worst kind of punishment, has become an object of desire and adoration'.

The Precious Cross reconciles us with God in the Person of Jesus Christ; it's the symbol of our spiritual struggle; it's the guardian of the world; it's the most precious symbol we have in our Church. The whole mystery of the salvation and redemption of the human race lies hidden in the Cross of Christ.

In honouring the Cross, we inevitably also honour Christ Who died upon it. Saint

John the Damascan says that, when kissing a particular Cross, 'we reverence the actual Cross itself, even though it is made of different material. We do not reverence the material- God forbid- but the form, as a symbol of Christ'.

In the Orthodox Church, all people and all things are offered and sacrificed through the Cross. When we make the sign of the Cross, we ask for its power in order to act with purity towards the world. As the Romanian theologian Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae said, we declare our desire to be raised through our efforts, as well as the encounter with this power; to glorify God with all our actions and pains in this world, even our death; to live and die for God and to demonstrate in every way that we are sacrificing ourselves for Him Who was crucified for the sake of humankind.

The holy Fathers and the Church writers used many images to express the theology of the Cross as the tree of eternal life. Clement the Alexandrian, saw the Cross as a tree on which Christ, our Life, was hanged . Fotios the Great says that the tree of life was planted in the middle of Paradise; the new tree of life, the Cross was planted in the middle of the inhabited world, which it blessed by its presence, changing the earth from an accursed place into Paradise . Saint Cyril of Jerusalem makes the following observation: 'if, then, our first ancestors were exiled from Paradise because of the fruit of a tree, now, through the tree of Jesus, the faithful will enter Paradise .

The Fathers also recommend that we reverence the form of the Cross, since it's the sign and greatest trophy of Christ against the devil and all the ranks of the enemy, 'because the demons tremble and flee when they see this sign being made' .

When we Christians see the Cross, make the sign of the Cross, reverence the form and symbol of the Cross, we see Christ crucified with the eyes of our soul and we bow down before Him. As Saint Ieronymos puts it: 'We do not embrace the Cross as God, but in doing so we indicate the genuine proclivity of our soul towards Christ crucified'.

When we gaze upon the Cross, we experience the depth of divine love. In addressing the Precious Cross, Saint John the Damascan says: 'now the profundity of divine love is made known' . Armed with the power of the Cross we overcome the sorrows and trials of our everyday life and sing with the hymnographer: 'We bow before your Cross, Lord, and we glorify your holy Resurrection.