

Great Lent: Sunday Bible Reading — Week 3

[Ξένες γλώσσες](#) / [In English](#)



Today's Gospel (Mark 8:34-38; 9:1), read on the Third Sunday of Great Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross) is one of the most well-known Bible readings, which includes the renowned question: "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"

The Gospel passage begins with a powerful statement, a challenge, in fact, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The Week 1 installment of our Great Lent: Sunday Bible Reading initiative focused on five words: Follow me and Come and see. Today we will focus on only three: If anyone wishes.



Does Christ say “You have to...” or “You must do this...” or something similar? No! He says, If anyone wishes ... meaning, among other things, that it is our choice. It is always our choice. Humans have been given freedom by God; He respects and does not violate it.

God is explicit on the theme and importance of freedom: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

This phraseology is almost identical to today’s Gospel: If anyone hears. Cooperation and synergy between creation (man) and Creator (God) are required for our salvation, although as we read in the Bible God does not force anyone to cooperate with Him.

This point is of great importance, especially in today’s society where freedom and the wanting to do what one wants is distorted and perverted with harmful consequences for both humanity and the environment.

Living a Christian life by praying, fasting, almsgiving, being loving and merciful, attending church services, and living a sacramental life is for our benefit. God is perfect, He is the centrepiece of all history, the Alpha and the Omega; He is in need of nothing.

God offers salvation equally to all, for He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4). We have the freedom to follow God, if we wish.

And what does the Church offer to us for refreshment and support, for encouragement and spiritual strength? The Venerable and Life-giving Cross! St. Paul says: “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

In the Orthros Canon for the Third Sunday of Great Lent, St. Theodore the Stoudite entreats our Lord: “Thou hast made the instrument of death into a source of life. Sanctify those who venerate it.”

From St. Joseph the Hymnographer: “Let us venerate the Cross of the Lord, offering our tender affection as the cypress, the sweet fragrance of our faith as the cedar, and our sincere love as the pine; and let us glorify our Deliverer Who was nailed upon It.”

The Church provides us with the Holy Cross as a weapon against the evil one, but we have the freedom to choose to take it. Will you?

Source: gometropolis.org