

Sunday of the Holy Cross: 8th and 9th Commandments

"For the preaching of the Cross is, to them that perish, foolishness. But unto us which are saved, it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, at the half-way point in the sacred season of Holy Lent--the Great Fast--the Church erects the saving wood of the Cross before our eyes, as a reminder to us that this journey through Lent is a journey to Jerusalem and to Golgotha or Calvary, to the very foot of the Cross, upon which hung the Salvation of the world, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ.

It is St. Paul who reminds us that we Christians "preach the Cross." He was referring not just to himself and the apostles and disciples, but to all Christians of all times, including us, today. This seems like foolishness to many people in today's world, including even some so-called Christians, who do not cherish and treasure the Cross the way they should. This is because the Cross reminds everyone that we are supposed to pick up and bear our own crosses in daily life, no matter how light or how heavy they may be. We have a "way of the Cross" to walk in our lives, and we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless they are bearing a cross upon our shoulders. The gates of the Kingdom will open to that cross; the cross is, therefore, a "key" that opens heavenly gates that might otherwise be closed and locked to us. Therefore, our own personal way of the Cross is the way to joy, though the path may be difficult and harsh.

When we reach some maturity in our way of the Cross then we are able to forgive everyone, even when they hurt us, slight us, or slander us, and that is the way in which we "bear the cross". But on the contrary and for the most part, we react the way the rest of the world does when someone upsets us: we are angry, we judge, we sulk or become depressed. In other words, we throw down the cross and refuse to bear it. But the mature cross-bearer does none of these things. He forgives. He lets it go, gives it no further place in his thought, emotions, or actions. This is the way that Jesus Himself lived, and the way that He calls us to live.

Remember, He told us that He Himself is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He taught us how to live, how to bear our crosses and humble ourselves down, not seeking after things that the world values as pleasant and necessary, but which are actually so fragile and will in time go away.

The way of the Cross is to feel pain. Not self-inflicted pain; we're not masochists, but real pain, because things are not the way they should be, neither in our hearts, nor the hearts of our loved ones, nor the hearts of those in the world. It's not the way it should be. This hurts. It's painful.



Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple

One of the reasons why this cross is so painful is because the world does not obey the commandments given by God. And, for the most part, neither do we, though we may think we are doing so. When no one follows the commandments, life is not easy for anyone. The Lord Himself walked this way of the Cross from Bethlehem throughout His life. We call him "The Man of Sorrows" because His suffer, His Passion and Death, was for those who are separated from God. This caused Him intense and constant grief. It should grieve us, too, beginning with feeling the pain of our own sins and our own separation from God.

This brings us to the two Commandments that I want to discuss this morning, the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," and the Ninth, "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

These two commandments are among the most violated in the world today, to various degrees and in many ways, and this causes suffering, it makes our own personal crosses much heavier than they might otherwise be.

[The Eighth Commandment orders us to respect the property of others.](#) The obvious sins against this Commandment include theft, robbery, extortion or bribery, and fraud.

An insatiable thirst for pleasures and material goods is what causes people to break this Commandment, makes people greedy, although our Faith tries to teach us to be honest, unselfish, industrious and merciful. Total unselfishness and renunciation of personal possessions are great Christian virtues. Such evangelistic idealism was followed by many of the faithful such as St. Antony the Great, St. Nicholas the miracle worker, Sts. Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov, the Blessed Xenia of Petersburg, St. Herman of Alaska, St. Archbishop John of San Francisco, Blessed Fr. Seraphim of Platina, and many others—actually countless others.

[The Ninth Commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness", forbids any form of lying or falseness, including gossip about others.](#) In particular, slander must be avoided as the temptation to commit this sin comes directly from Satan; this is why the very name "devil" means "slanderer"—one who tells untruths. Mockery of others is included in this, because making fun of others is a sign of a proud spirit and a cruel heart, which are completely the opposite of Christian virtue.

Bearing the heavy cross of never telling an untruth, of never bearing false witness—not even by exaggeration—is a vital virtue for the Christian. It is almost completely ignored in today's pagan culture. Observing it and the other commandments creates a heavy cross indeed for the one who is following Christ, but if we keep our eyes on the actual saving Cross of the Lord, this burden becomes lighter and begins to feel joyful rather than heavy or sad. This is because the Savior's Cross became a trophy of victory over sin and death, a ladder from earth to heaven, a spiritual sword, and the constant gaze of the saints. This is why we wear a cross around our

necks, why we place the cross in our homes and churches and why we bless everything—including ourselves—with the Sign of the Cross. Even the consecration of the bread and wine at Divine Liturgy, changing them into the Body and Blood of the Redeemer, is accomplished not only by words but by the Sign of the Cross made over them by the priest.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us hasten to embrace our own daily crosses, and thereby embrace the Cross of Christ itself, following Him steadfastly through the trials and tribulations of this life and straight into the Kingdom of Heaven!

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.