

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

September 14, 2019
Elevation of the Holy Cross

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics,
and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. ... For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 18:18, 22-24)

The feast upon which I greet all of you is one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church and rightly so, since it provides us with the spiritual foundation of our lives as Christians. As the holy prophet Simeon told the most holy Theotokos, her Son would be a sign of contradiction to many, and it is precisely because of the cross that He is a contradiction. Only a nous that has been purified and illumined is able to agree with the words of Saint Paul quoted above. As Saint Theophan the Recluse reminds us:

There is a spiritual exaltation of the cross in the heart. It happens when one firmly resolves to crucify himself, or to mortify his passions—something so essential in Christians that, according to the Apostle, they only are Christ's who have crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts (cf. Gal. 5:24). Having raised this cross in themselves, Christians hold it exalted all their lives. Let every Christian soul ask himself if this is how it is, and let him hearken to the answer that his conscience gives him in his heart. Oh, may we not hear, "You only please your flesh in the passions; your cross is not exalted—it is thrown into the pit of the passions, and is rotting there in negligence and contempt!"

When the Lord was taken down from the Cross, the Cross remained on Golgotha, and then it was thrown into the pit that was in that place, where this instrument of execution was usually thrown, together with other refuse. Soon Jerusalem was razed and all of its edifices were leveled to the ground. The pit containing the Cross of Christ was also filled over. When the pagans rebuilt the city (the Jews were forbidden to come near the place where it was), it happened that on the place where the Cross of Christ was hidden, they placed an idol of Venus, the pagan Goddess of fornication and all manner of lusts. This is what the enemy suggested to them. This is how it is with our inner cross. When the enemy destroys the spiritual order in the soul, this is our mental Jerusalem, and then the spiritual cross is thrown down from the Golgotha of the heart and is covered over with the garbage of the affections and lusts. Lustful self-pleasure then rises like a tower over all our inner peace, and everything in us bows down to it and fulfills its commands until grace shines upon us, inspiring us to cast down the idol and lift up the cross of self-crucifixion.

This is indeed a joyous feast for those who are being saved by the precious cross! As the Exapostilarion for this feast tells us: "The Cross is the guardian of the whole world; the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings; the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the wounding of demons."

A blessed feast to all, and may the thrice holy God save you and give you strength through the power of His precious cross!

Yours in Christ,

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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