St. Innocent Orthodox Church

✙ 1967-2018 ✙ Moscow Patriarchal Parishes ✙

23300 W. Chicago ✝ Redford, MI 48239 ✝ 313-538-1142 ✝ *Fax:* 313-538-8126

Church Website: www.stinnocentchurch.com ✝ *E-Mail:* frroman@firebirdvideos.com

St. Innocent Monastic Community: 9452 Hazelton, Redford, MI 48239 ✝ 313-535-9080

PASTOR: Mitered Archpriest FR. ROMAN STAR ✝ *Cell:* 313-319-0590

Dean, Central States Deanery, Patriarchal Parishes

ASSISTANT PRIESTS: FR. DANEIL SHIRAK ✝ 313-295-3073

FR. JOSHUA GENIG ✝ 630-936-6386

DEACON: Dn. Michael Comerford, *Attached*

ATTACHED: Sister Ioanna

CHOIR DIRECTOR: Elizabeth Star Hatfield

READERS: Robert Latsko, George Hanoian, William Davis, Henry Hancock

MARCH 11, 2018

EPISTLE: Hebrews 4:14 - 5:6 (#311)
GOSPEL: St. Mark 8:34 - 9:1 (#37)
TONE: 7

✙ 3rd Sunday of Great Lent ✙ VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS ✙

✝ 9:15am — HOURS & AKATHIST &/OR CANON; CONFESSIONS ✝
✝ 10am — DIVINE LITURGY OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT ✝

COMMEMORATED TODAY: **Veneration of the Cross.** St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (638-644). St. Euthymius, Bishop of Novgorod (1458). Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him: Asclepiades, Macedonia, Linus, and Sabina (250). Translation of the Relics of Martyr Epimachus of Pelusium. St. Sophronius, Bishop of Vracha (Bulgaria—1813). Ven. Sophronii, Recluse, of the Kiev Caves (Far Caves—13th c.).

FOR THE REPOSE OF: Estelle & Joseph Star; Anna & John Witkowski; Michael Sr. & Margaret Rusko; Mary, Andrew, Daniel, Michael & Lottie Yakuber; Ross & Margaret Falsetti; Helen, John & Carole Andrayko; Peter & Theresa Harvilla; Betty Martell; Frances, Todd , John & Theresa Smoly; Peter Glover; Irene Adams; Ethel Elizabeth & Wayne Joshua deVyver, David Horka; Michael Rusko; Anna Lichagina, Yelena & Zinaïda Korniyevskaya; Joseph Nossal; Michelle Tucker; Todd Comerford, John Manier, Jr.

MEMORY ETERNAL! Olga Angelo, (newly departed, 2/26/18), *by Cousin, Fr. Roman & Matushka Rose Marie*
Daniel Yakuber, whose anniversary of his repose is on Friday, 16 March

FOR THE HEALTH OF: Archimandrite Seraphim; Priest Daneil, Mat. Debra & Corrina Shirak; Priest Joshua, Mat. Abigail, Emma, Clare, Rose & Anna Genig; Deacon Michael, Mat. Mary Ellen & Julius Comerford; Matushka Mary Donahue; Reader Robert Latsko, Reader George & Betty Hanoian, William Basil Davis, Rose Nossal, Mary Glover, Nancy Cupp, Vasiliki Stamoulis, Gerald Martell, Azbehat, Carl deVyver, Jo Anne Nicholas, Joan Rusko, Daria, Joseph Nossal, Ed Manier, Pat Harbut, Iskias Naizghi, Fr. Dimitrie Vincent, Elaine R, Levi Troyer

ALSO FOR: James Star, *by brother, Fr. Roman, Matushka Rose Marie & family*
Aleksey Korniyevski, who celebrates his Birthday Today, Sunday, 11 March
Thomas Witkowski, who celebrates his Birthday Tomorrow, Monday, 12 March
Jason Wess, who celebrates his Birthday on Tuesday, 13 March

❊ MAY GOD GRANT THEM MANY YEARS! ❊

SCHEDULE FOR THE COMING WEEK

(No meat, fish, dairy or alcohol until Pascha)

TODAY:	Sun 3/11	6pm	COCC LENTEN VESPERS #3: *St. Michael (Russian Patriarchal Parishes), 27355 W. Chicago (Inkster & Beech Daly)*
Wednesday	3/14	6:30pm	PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY & pot-luck supper #4
Saturday	3/17	10am	SOUL-SATURDAY MEMORIAL DIVINE LITURGY FOR THE DEPARTED #4
		4pm	GREAT VESPERS & CONFESSIONS
Sunday	3/18		***4th Sunday of Great Lent — St. John of the Ladder (Climicus) Sunday***
		9am	HOURS, AKATHIST &/or CANON
		9:30am	GENERAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE & ABSOLUTIONS #2
		10am	DIVINE LITURGY OF ST. BASIL; followed by Coffee Hour
		6pm	COCC Lenten Vespers #4, *St. Petka (Serbian), 1755 E. Wattles, Troy @John R/Troy Athens High School*

PROSPHORA FOR TODAY IS OFFERED BY: ***Frances Roy***

In Memory Eternal of: Frank, Walter, Eva, Rose, John, Mark, Paul, Helen, Annette, Ronald, Russ; and all departed family members & parishioners of St. Innocent; and **For the Health of:** Virginia, Lisa, Terry, Johnny, Ana & unborn child, Alice, Autumn, Eric, Ken & Frances; all living family members & parishioners of St. Innocent.

✙ CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST! ✙ HE IS NOW AND EVER SHALL BE! ✙

CANDLES FOR LAST SUNDAY, 4 MARCH

YEARLY CHURCH VIGIL LAMPS:

Royal Doors Lamp: In Memory of Husband, Joseph; Son, Kenneth; parents, Michael & Margaret Rusko, & John & Martha Nossal, *by Rose Nossal*
Altar Candelabra: In Memory of my Parents, John & Anna Witkowski & Fr. Roman's Parents, Joseph & Estelle Star, *by Matushka Rose Marie*
Altar Candles (2): In Memory of Irene Adams, *by Goddaughter, Rose Ann Everhardt*
Iconostasis Lamps: In Memory of departed family & friends; & Health of family & friends, *by Fr. Protodeacon Daniel & Mat. Irene Sudol*
Candles on the Solea: In Memory of Peter & Theresa Harvilla, Norman & Monica Holst, & Ricky Ellis, *by Jason & Debra Truskowski*
Table of Oblation Lamp: In Memory of Parents, Helen & John Andrayko, Sr. & sister, Carole Andrayko, *by John Andrayko, Jr.*
Reliquary-Icon Lamps: Sts. Innocent, Tikhon & Herman: Health of Joseph/Sue; Robert/Diane; Pat/John; Joseph B., Jared, Jay; Rachelle/Aaron, Gabriel; Tricia, Lindsey; & In Memory of sisters, Anna, Margaret, Theresa & Irene; & brothers, John, Edwin & Michael *by Rose Nossal*
Reliquary-Icon Lamps: Sts. Elizabeth & Raphael: Health of the Genig and the Just Families, *by Fr. Joshua & Matushka Abigail Genig*
Reliquary-Icon Lamps: St. Seraphim & St. Alexis: In Memory of Ross & Margaret Falsetti, *by daughters, Rose Ann Everhardt & Margie Martell*
Reliquary-Icon Lamps: St. Nestor & St. Gerontius: In Memory of Rusko Family: Grandparents, Anna, Alexandra, Mike, Margaret, John, Mary, George, Pauline, Pete, Irene, Andrew, Anna, Grandparents Nickolas & Anna Schulik, *by Rose Nossal*
Reliquary-Icon Lamps: St. Hilarion & Sts. Alexandra & Martha: In Memory of Parents, Ethel Elizabeth & Wayne Joshua; Robert David H; // //& Health of brother, Carl, by Sister Ioanna

IN MEMORY OF (MEMORY ETERNAL!)

Joseph & Estelle Star, *by son Father Roman and family*
Paul & Alexandra Yupco, Basil & Ellen Starinshak, *by grandson, Father Roman and family*
John & Anna Witkowski, *by daughter, Matushka Rose Marie and family*
Samuel & Mary Kupec, *by granddaughter, Matushka Rose Marie and family*
Parents, Helen & John Andrayko, and sister, Carole Andrayko, *by John Andrayko* + + + My husband, Michael Rusko, *by Joan Rusko*
My husband, Joe; my sisters, Margaret & Ross Falsetti, Anna & Mike Elaschat, Theresa & Pete Harvilla, Irene, & brothers, Michael, John & Edwin Rusko; niece, Rose Mary & Dean Hough; Joe's brothers, Raymond & Walter Nossal, & sisters, Theresa, Florence & Helen Nossal, *by Rose Nossal* ++ + Pete & Theresa Harvilla, *by Mary Ann Harvilla & Kay Truskowski* + + + Jaimie Truskowski, *by daughter Kay T.*
Parents, Ethel Elizabeth & Wayne Joshua; David H; Nina I; Marion P; Fr. Photius; Archm. Roman; Mo. Benedicta, Molly, Olive, *by Sr. Ioanna*
Olga Angelo, (newly-departed), *by cousin Fr. Roman & family* + + + Dan Chambers, *by the Hancocks* + + + Stafford McCarthy, *by the Hancocks*
Shirley Troyer, Child Lana Wilson, Betty & Paul Stelmaszek, Keith Hansen, *by Becky Jurczyszyn.*
Parents, Michael & Lottie Yakuber; Grandparents; Uncle Chet & Aunt Irene; Donald Yakuber; Daniel Yakuber, *by Nancy Cupp*
My brother, Ricky, *by Debra Truskowski* + + + Grandparents Harvilla & Holst, *by Debra Truskowski*

FOR THE HEALTH OF: (MANY YEARS!)

Elizabeth & Lawrence, Caitlin & Zachary, *by parents & grandparents, Father Roman & Matushka Rose Marie*
Gregory & Tamiko Star, *by parents, Father Roman & Matushka Rose Marie*
Children, Grandchildren & Great-grandchildren; Monk Fr. Sdn. Tikhon (Dade); *by Rose Nossal*
Father Roman & Matushka & family; Sister Ioanna; John Andrayko; Nancy; Mary G; Jo Anne N; Grandson Joey *(in the Navy Reserves)* & all people in the Armed Forces; & all St. Innocent Church parishioners, *by Rose Nossal* + + + Family & Friends, *by Mary Ann Harvilla & Kay*
Brother, Greg & Donna; nephew, Gregory & Liz & new baby; & nephew, Alex, *by Mary Ann & Kay* + + + Ed Manier, *by Mary Ann H. & Kay*
Archimandrites Nafanail, Gregory & Seraphim; Fr. Roman & Mat. Rose Marie; Fr. Daneil & fam; Fr. Lawrence B & fam; Fr. Laurence L & fam; Fr. Dcn. Michael & fam; Mat. Mary D; Carl; Monk Fr. Tikhon; Sdn Andrew; Rdr Robert; Robert M; David Samuel/Sky & Avi; JoAnne/Nick; Athanasius; John A; Ed/Tiffany; Kim/Mark & fam; Frances/Ken; Deborah H; Rose; Vasiliki; Levi; Elaine; Mark S; Fr. Dimitrie, *by Sr. Ioanna*
Rose Nossal, *by John Andrayko* + + + John Andrayko (May God watch over him), *by Rose Nossal* + + + Elena Kuligina, *by Marianna Wess*
Jason, Marianna, Amilia, Liliana, Andrew, *by Wess Family* + + + Galina, Oleg, & Sophia Chernukhina, *by Marianna Wess*
Levi Troyer, Mike/Leia/ Reece/Wyatt Wilson; Bob & Joan Jurczyszyn; Paul/Pete/Krista/Jacob/Claire/Matt Stelmaszek; Damon Trestain; Toni & Richard Bussen; Liz/Nathan/Andrea Faust; Gussie Salvaggio, *by Becky Jurczyszyn* + + + My family, Children, Grandchildren; Rose Nossal; Mary Glover; Fr. Roman & Matushka Rose Marie; Sister Ioanna; our President; all St. Innocent parishioners, *by Nancy Cupp*
My sister Stephanie *(battling cancer), by Debra Truskowski* + + + My husband & children, *by Debra Truskowski*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(1) LITTLE CAESAR'S PIZZA KITS FUND-RAISER. If you didn't yet place your order for frozen Pizza Kits, you can still participate in this important fund-raiser for our parish. Please buy at least one kit, for yourself or someone else. The **deadline** for orders & payments is **Sunday, March 18th**; the frozen kits will be delivered to church on the following Saturday, March 24th. If you don't want to eat them yourself, please buy a family pizza kit to be donated to a local needy family. See Kim Hancock and her children, Claire & Eva, who are handling the project.
(2) OUR SINCERE THANK YOU'S TO: MARK HANCOCK & CHILDREN, for remodeling the children's/educational area; **LARRY HATFIELD**, for working on repairing the garage door; **DEACON DANIEL & MAT. IRENE SUDOL of NJ,** for donating candles to be used throughout the church; **PIEROGI WORKERS**, who made & packaged 107 dozen pierogi, and cleaned up, on Saturday, March 3rd: Mary Ann Harvilla, Anna Margaret Costa, John Andrayko, Matushka Rose Marie, Jason, Debra & Ian Truskowski, Elizabeth Hatfield, Becky Jurczyszyn, George & Betty Hanoian, Nancy Cupp, and Kim, Claire, Eva & Henry Hancock. Thank you to each one for their work on behalf of our parish.
(3) WELCOME BACK TO THOMAS WITKOWSKI. We are happy to have Thomas Witkowski, (Matushka Rose Marie's brother), back with us again, just in time for his birthday tomorrow. **(Happy Birthday and Many Years!)**
(4) PASCHA FLOWERS & BOWS: Please donate for our **Pascha flowers** to decorate Christ's tomb and the church for Pascha: 36 lilies at $10 & 36 geraniums at $5 each. (You get to take them home after Pascha.) Also, **Pascha Bows**, like Christmas Bows, are our two annual fund-raisers, vital for paying our bills. Please donate at least 1 'Bow' for the living and 1 for the departed, with a $5 donation for each. Use the cards Mary Ann has already decorated, or write the names of your loved ones and friends for whom you are praying on index-cards and your cards will be decorated and attached to our large cross until Ascension. See Mary Ann Harvilla for both the flowers and Pascha Bows. Please help us to meet our goals.

THE CROSS: "TO REFRESH OUR SOULS AND ENCOURAGE US"

By Fr. Stephen Kostoff

"Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection, we glorify."

This hymn – together with the accompanying rite of venerating the Cross – replaces the usual Trisagion hymn during the Divine Liturgy on the Third Sunday of Great Lent. According to *The Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion*, the full title of this mid-lenten commemoration is "The Sunday of the Veneration of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross."

In a wonderful commentary, *The Synaxarion* sets before our spiritual sight the meaning of this particular commemoration and its timing: "The precious and Life-Giving Cross is now placed before us to refresh our souls and encourage us who may be filled with a sense of bitterness, resentment, and depression. The Cross reminds us of the Passion of our Lord, and by presenting to us His example, it encourages us to follow Him in struggle and sacrifice, being refreshed, assured and comforted" [page 78].

Hopefully, the first three weeks of the Fast – even if we have truly "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" [Galatians 5:24] – have not led us to experience "bitterness, resentment and depression!" However, we could be suffering from precisely those spiritual wounds for other reasons and diverse circumstances in our lives, both external and internal. My own pastoral experience tells me that this is probably – if not assuredly – the case. And there is no better time than Great Lent to acknowledge this. Such acknowledgment could lead to genuine healing if pursued in a patient and humble manner.

How, then, can we be healed? Perhaps the Sunday of the Cross reveals our basic starting point. The Cross of our Lord, placed before our vision, can release us from our bondage to these passions when we realize that Christ transformed this instrument of pain, suffering and death into an "emblem of victory." Christ has absorbed and taken our sins upon Himself, nailing them to the Cross. In the process, "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Him"—or, in some variations, "in it," meaning the Cross [Colossians 2:15]. These "principalities and powers" continue to harass us to this day, but if we are "in Christ," then we can actualize His victory over them and reveal their actual powerlessness. Our lenten journey is leading us to the foot of the Cross and to the empty and life-giving tomb, and the Third Sunday of Great Lent anticipates our final goal so as to encourage us. Again, from *The Synaxarion*: "As they who walk on a long and hard way are bowed down by fatigue find great relief and strengthening under the cool shade of a leafy tree, so do we find comfort, refreshment, and rejuvenation under the Life-Giving Cross, which our Holy Fathers "planted" on this Sunday. Thus, we are fortified and enabled to continue our Lenten journey with a light way, rested and encouraged" [pg. 79].

Certainly none of the above is meant to deflect our attention away from the "scandal of the Cross" by poeticizing this scandal away in pious rhetoric. We must never lose sight of the sufferings of our Lord on the Cross, and the "price" He paid to release us from bondage to sin and death. The world in its indifference will never come to understand the enormity of Christ's sacrifice. So as not to lose sight of the utter horror of crucifixion as a form of capital punishment, I would like to include a passage from Martin Hengel's book *Crucifixion*: "Crucifixion satisfied the primitive lust for revenge and the sadistic cruelty of individual rulers and of the masses. It was usually associated with other forms of torture, including at least flogging. At relatively small expense and to great public effect the criminal could be tortured to death for days in an unspeakable way. Crucifixion is thus a specific expression of the inhumanity dormant within men which these days is expressed, for example, in the call for the death penalty, for popular justice and for harsher treatment of criminals, as an expression of retribution. It is a manifestation of trans-subjective evil, a form of execution which manifests the demonic character of human cruelty and bestiality" [page 87].

So much for the "noble simplicity and greatness" of the ancient world! But there is "nothing new under the sun," and fallen human nature is just as cruel and evil today. Again, Christ absorbed all of that human cruelty and bestiality on the Cross. This was a scandal, for the Son of God died the death of a slave on the Cross [Philippians 2:8]. Now, as a "new creation" in Christ, we must of course manifest our freedom from precisely that dark and demonic abyss into which human beings can plunge, and manifest the transfiguration of our human "energy" into the virtues that are so wonderfully revealed in the lives of the saints. This was the prayer of the Apostle Paul when the light of the crucified and risen Lord began to shine in a world of darkness: "May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us [or you] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins [Colossians 1:14].

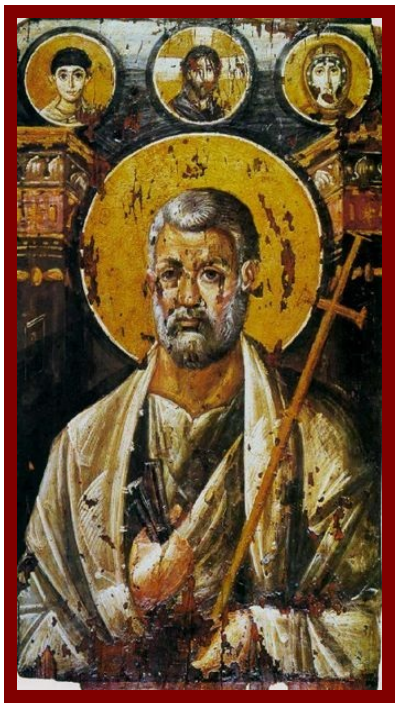
The Church understands and will put before our gaze the sufferings of the Lord during Holy Week. But it is also from within the Church that we come to know the victory of Christ achieved through His death on the Cross and fully revealed in His Resurrection. Thus the marvelous paradox of venerating a "Life-Giving Cross!" The rhetoric of the Church's language is thereby not empty but revelatory of a mystery that has been accomplished in our midst. *The Synaxarion* concludes its section on "The Sunday of the Veneration of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross" with the following prayer, a fitting way, I hope, to conclude this meditation: "O Christ our God, through the power of the Holy Cross, deliver us from the influence of our crafty enemy and count us worthy to pass with courage through the course of the forty days and to venerate Thy divine Passion and Thy Life-Giving Resurrection. Be merciful to us, for Thou alone art good and full of love for mankind. Amen.

EVERYONE LOVES A WINNER

Rev. Dr. J. Sergius Halvorsen

We celebrate athletes that run and jump, throw and catch better and faster than anyone else. We marvel at entrepreneurs who start companies that earn billions of dollars. We idolize the actors and musicians who are at the top of their craft. Everyone loves a winner.

We live in a culture that worships winners. It's all about winning elections, winning arguments, winning friends and influencing people. Winning may be our greatest obsession. What does it take to win? What strategy will give us an advantage over our opponent? What kind of training and preparation will give us the edge that we need to come out on top? We work and plan and scheme to figure out a way to win, and then we dream about the glory that will be ours.



This is probably what Peter was thinking when he and the disciples entered Caesarea Philippi with Jesus. It was there, in that city with its famous pagan temple, that Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" The disciples said, "Some people think that you are John the Baptist, some say that you are Elijah, and others say that you are one of the prophets." But then, Peter, going for the win, says, "You are the Christ, God's anointed, the messiah!" Peter does not think of Jesus as some member of the supporting cast; he says that Jesus is the Christ, the one that God sent to deliver His people. But Jesus immediately commands them not to tell anyone about Him. Isn't that strange? Why does Jesus tell them not to say anything about Him? **It is because Peter was wrong.**

Yes, Jesus is the Christ, but what Peter has in mind when he says that Jesus is the "Christ" is completely off base. Peter **thinks** the Christ will be the great hero who ends up with more money and more power and is more feared than the Emperor of Rome. Peter **thinks** that the Christ will raise up an army to fight for the Hebrew people and crush their Roman oppressors. Peter **thinks** that the Christ is going to be a winner on the world's terms.

Jesus must have known exactly what Peter was thinking.

And this is why Jesus immediately starts telling His disciples that the Christ, the Son of Man, must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and after three days be raised.

Yes, Jesus is the Christ, but He's a different kind of Christ than the one Peter was looking for. After Jesus spells out very plainly to the disciples that the Christ is not going to bring about victory on human terms, Jesus began to teach the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things, that He would be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, that He would be killed, and after three days rise again. Jesus told them all of this in plain unequivocal language. But then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke him. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him. Peter actually rebukes Jesus.

In other words, Peter speaks to Jesus like some sort of campaign manager, "Lord, what are you talking about? Rejection, suffering, being killed…are you kidding me?!? This is not what God's anointed is supposed to do, and this is certainly NOT what You are going to do!"

Peter **thinks** that he knows better than Jesus. Peter **thinks** that Jesus needs to be corrected about what it means to be the Christ. And how easy is it for us to make the same mistake. In our effort to win our own victories, how easy is it to tell God what to do and how to do it?

"Lord, make sure that I get a big payoff."

"Lord, make sure that my plans work out this time."

"Lord, do exactly what I want, so that I can win."

Sometimes we may think that God has strayed from the playbook, things aren't turning out as we planned so maybe we need to give God a reminder about what God is supposed to do. Peter definitely thought that he had to tell Jesus what to do in order to achieve an earthly victory. That's why Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me Satan. For you are not on the side of God but on the side of men." Jesus tells Peter and us that winning, according to the rules of this world, is a false victory. Christ says "Whoever would save his life would lose it." An earthly victory is a false victory because, for every army that marches home in victory, there are scores of widows and orphans who weep in the ashes and rubble of defeat. For every billionaire entrepreneur, there are millions of people living in poverty. For everyone who wins an argument, there is someone who is left in anger and resentment. And the bottom line is that we don't always win. More often than not, when we lose, or when our plans don't work out, in our desperation we can so easily turn against God and turn against the people we love.

This is exactly what happened to Peter when he denied Jesus on the night before the Crucifixion. In the cold, darkness of that courtyard outside of the house of the high priest, Peter watched and waited, hoping that somehow his plans and schemes for the messiah could still be salvaged. But when the bystanders said, "Hey, aren't you one of Jesus' friends; Yeah, you are one of Jesus' disciples; You are a Galilean, you must be one of Jesus' followers." Three times, Peter denied that he knew Jesus, invoking a curse and swearing, "I do not know this man Jesus."

And when Peter realized what he had done, he broke down and wept. Everything had gone wrong, and in his desperation, he had denied and abandoned Jesus. Peter's life had become a living hell. To worship the false-victory of this world is to live in hell. Perhaps in that moment, Peter remembered Jesus' words, "Get behind me Satan." But in that moment, maybe Peter **also** remembered what Jesus said right after that. Jesus says to His disciples, "Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." These are the same words that Jesus speaks to us on the third Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of the Cross.

Jesus does not say, "whoever desires to come after me should go out and get himself crucified." Jesus specifically says, "take up the cross and follow me"—which is the complete opposite of everything we know about winning. To carry your cross is to experience the absolute shame of defeat. It is like the condemned man who is commanded to prepare the noose for his own hanging. It is like the victims in the concentration camp who are forced to dig the pit that will become their own mass grave.

In Jesus' time, the ritual of forcing a condemned man to carry his cross was murderous mockery. Carrying the cross was part of the bloody Roman propaganda that said, "Behold this man, who disobeyed our commands.

Look at how we crush him and strip him of his last shred of dignity.

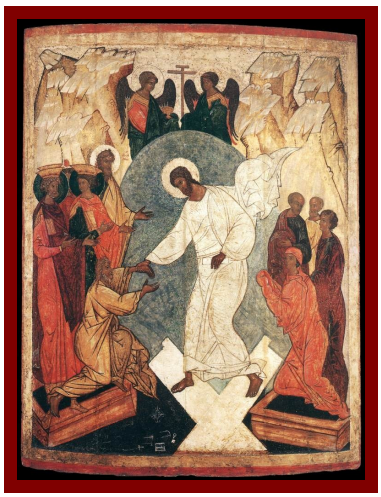
Look at how we force him to carry the cross that we will use to execute him.

Look at the power of the Empire, look at how we have won."

And Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, submits to the Cross willingly, to show that God's victory is **not** the victory of this world. Christ's death on the Cross is the sign that the power of God is greater than the most hideous power of this world. For in the very midst of the humiliation, and agony of crucifixion, as they nailed His hands and feet to the Cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

And at that moment, the world was forever changed. Because the hateful power of this world was defeated by the Love of God.

By carrying His cross, Jesus shows that the evil of man is powerless against the mercy of God. By carrying His cross, Jesus marches straight into the depths of hell and broke the bonds of sin and death. By carrying His cross, Jesus shows us a way out of the darkness of sin into the pure light of forgiveness. **This is the victory of Christ, and this is why we bow down before the Cross.**



Jesus' victory on the Cross is the most unlikely victory that the world has ever seen. Because in the Resurrection, Jesus did not return to take vengeance on the people who betrayed Him and murdered Him. In the Resurrection, Jesus returned and forgave Peter. And then Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the Good News to the very people who had killed Him — the gentiles, the Romans.

We see this so clearly in Acts, when Paul and Silas had been arrested and beaten and thrown into jail. There they are in that dark, dank prison, singing hymns and praising God when all of a sudden there was an earthquake and the doors were opened, and all the chains of the prisoners were loosed. When the jailer woke up, and saw what had happened, he assumed that all of the prisoners had escaped, and in his despair, he was about to kill himself. But Paul cried out, "Don't harm yourself, we are all here." In that moment, it would have been so easy for Paul to have said, "Ha, let that jailer get what he deserves." But instead he saved the man from his despair. The jailer cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" And Paul told him about the love and mercy and power of Jesus, the Crucified Messiah.

This is the victory of the Gospel: those small, bright moments of reconciliation, when people who would otherwise be enemies, turn and embrace one another in the love of Christ. This is what it means to take up the Cross and follow Christ.

Paul and Silas, and Peter and all the other disciples took up the Cross and followed Christ. They were given divine courage to endure the same kind of humiliation that Christ endured, and to share the love and mercy of God with everyone.

And today, as we fall down before the Holy Cross, as it is lifted up and we praise it in our hymns and songs, we are strengthened with the same divine courage. We face the evil, and the anger of this world, and we take up our Cross and follow Christ, showing mercy and forgiveness to everyone around us, glorifying Jesus Christ. For Jesus' victory, His victory on the Cross, the victory of God's love, is our one true and lasting victory.

The Rev. Dr. J. Sergius Halvorsen (SVOTS '96) received his M.Div. from St. Vladimir's Seminary and completed his doctoral dissertation at Drew University in 2002. From 2000 to 2011 he taught at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell Connecticut, where he also served as Director of Distance Learning. He was ordained to the priesthood in February 2004, and currently serves on the faculty of SVOTS as Assistant Professor of Homiletics and Rhetoric and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program.

Source: www.oca.org