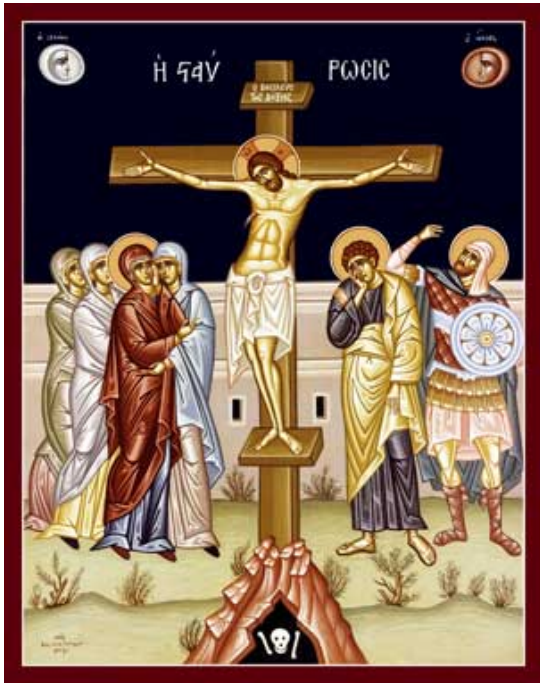


The Cross and the Throne

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



"Why would you want to be a Christian?" The verses from Hebrews (4:14-5:6) for this Sunday of the Veneration of the Precious Cross provide a convincing answer. They outline the gifts our Savior bestows. They also tell us precisely who He is.

The passage tells us that Jesus Christ has "passed through the heavens"—in other words, He has been exalted as God's Son. The next verses describe His work among us when He became Man. We read that we do not have a high priest who is "unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." This means that we do not have a Savior who, being God's Son, can't understand what it means to be tempted as we humans constantly are. Christ fully shared human testing and temptation. But because He did not succumb, He is strong enough to save us, while still understanding our weakness. As God's Son, He has opened the way to the Kingdom. Therefore we can "approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."


So He gives us an immense gift and privilege. We can approach God's "throne"—His very presence—with boldness, and not be struck dead for our presumption. We can receive grace, mercy, and help.

With such gifts and assurances, who wouldn't want to be a Christian? But the day's Gospel reading (Mark 8:34-9:1) reminds us that it is no easy task. Jesus calls the crowd as well as the disciples to hear His words, so we know they are meant for everyone: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

What does "take up (or bear) one's cross" mean? Some people refer to things like the loud barking of the neighbor's dog as "a cross I have to bear." But when Christ took up and bore the cross, it meant gross injustice, excruciating pain, public ridicule and humiliation. He warns us that these things await us if we really want to follow Him. They are there on the path to the throne of grace described in Hebrews. As we sing during most Divine Liturgies: "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake."

In the passage from Mark, Jesus also speaks of the time when He will come "in the glory of His Father and the holy angels." The throne, at that time, will be the throne of judgment. If we have been ashamed of Christ, unwilling to endure ridicule and humiliation for Him, He will judge us accordingly as wanting no part of Him.

But if we have stayed faithful and paid the cost of our faith, we can know even before we die that, in Mark's words, "the kingdom of God has come with power."



Kontakion - Tone 7

Now the flaming sword
no longer guards the gates of paradise;
it has been mysteriously quenched
by the wood of the Cross!
The sting of death and the victory of hell
have been vanquished;
for Thou, O my Savior,
didst come and cry to those in hell:
Enter again into Paradise.