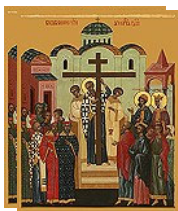


## ✠Bulletin✠

Week of September 13, 2026



## Holy Cross Orthodox Church

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**15th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**Celebration of**

**The Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Lifegiving Cross**

**Commemoration of the Founding of the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulcher) at Jerusalem (335).** Hieromartyr Cornelius the Centurion (1st c.). Martyr Straton of Nicomedia (3rd c.). Martyrs Chronides, Leontius and Serapion, of Alexandria (237). Martyrs Elias, Zoticus, Lucian, Valerian, Macrobius, and Gordian, at Tomis in Romania (320). St. Litorius, bishop of Tours (370). St. Eulogius I, patriarch of Alexandria (608). St. John of Prislop (Romania) (15th-16th c.). St. Cornelius of Padan-Olonets, disciple of St. Alexander of Svir, and with him Sts. Dionysius and Misael (16th c.). St. Meletius, patriarch of Alexandria (1601). Hieromartyr Julian of Galatia (4th c.). St. Peter of Atroë (9th c.). Greatmartyr Ketevan, Queen of Kakheti, Georgia (1624). Ven. Hierotheus of Kalamata, monk of Ivéron (Mt. Athos—1745).

### Weekly Liturgical Service Schedule

**Sunday September 13<sup>th</sup>**

**9:15 am** - Hours

**9:30 am** - Divine Liturgy

Celebration of the **Feast of the Elevation of the Cross**

### Weekly Schedule

**Sunday September 13<sup>th</sup>**

- Choir Practice for Bishop Gerasim's Visit
- Inquirers & Catechism classes

## The Lord's Twofold Cross

By St. Cleopa (Ilie)

Every time you heard the word "Cross," do not understand it as do the foolish sectarians who have filled the world and ravage the field of the Word of God. Don't think of the Holy Cross as they do but understand and remember that the word "Cross" has a twofold power and twofold mystery—a twofold Cross with a twofold meaning.

Do not understand the Holy Cross like these foolish people, who do not want to venerate the saving Cross of Christ, as the holy apostle Paul says. Let them blaspheme, for satan has darkened them, has placed his seal on their foreheads first of all—that is, where the brain is located, so they might not believe. He has placed his seal on their right hand, so they might not raise it to their foreheads to bless themselves with the saving sign of the most honorable and lifegiving Cross of Christ.

Thus, know that man is twofold, and the Holy Cross is twofold. Do you not see in man one hypostasis in two natures? One part is visible, that is, the body, and the other is not visible, that is, the soul, because it is of an invisible nature. Let us understand the Cross this way.

One Cross is material, visible, and the other—mysterious, mystical, and invisible, which we carry in our hearts. In the Holy Gospel, we hear it said that His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene stood by the Cross (John 19:25).

Do you hear? They stood by His Cross. Therefore, understand that to stand at His Cross does not mean to stand by the spiritual cross, but by the material, wooden Cross of Christ, by which stood the Mother of the Lord, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

When you hear: Come down from the cross (Matthew 27:40), this also means the wooden Cross of Christ on which He was crucified. And when you hear: And they took Jesus and led Him away. And He bearing His Cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha (John 19:16-17), let us also understand the material Cross. The Savior bore it on His back.

And when you hear that the Jews went to Pilate and asked him: "Break the legs of those who were crucified so we can take them down from their crosses

that the Sabbath day might not find them” (cf. John 19:31), for that Sabbath was a high day for the Jews, let us also understand here the same wooden Cross, and not a spiritual cross.

And when you hear Christ in the Gospel saying: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself—that is, love for himself, which binds us all very strongly—and take up His cross, and follow Me (Matthew 16:24), here we understand the spiritual cross which our Savior Jesus Christ bore before all, not on His shoulders, but in His soul.

When you hear from the Evangelist Matthew: And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (Matthew 10:38), then understand not a wooden cross, but a spiritual, invisible cross.

So keep in mind that Christ bore a twofold Cross: one in the soul: suffering, patience, piercing pain, shame, spitting, sorrow, and grief. Everything that He bore in His soul made up the spiritual cross of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. And the second, wooden Cross, He bore on His shoulders and by His will was crucified upon it for the salvation of the world.

The holy apostle Paul also bore two crosses: God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14). But he also bore another cross, as he himself says: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:27, 26).

So, know that when sectarians assault you because of the Holy Cross, they confess only the second cross, the cross of sufferings, and not the material one. We also recognize the first one, for Christ bore it. He bore the wooden Cross on His back and the cross of suffering in His soul even unto death—the death on the Cross.

The Cross is victory, the Cross is the banner of Christ, the Cross is the weapon by which Christ overthrew the forces of hell and death. Therefore, cursed and damned is he who does not venerate the precious and lifegiving Cross of Christ!

Man is twofold, and he must bear a twofold cross, as St. Ephraim the Syrian and St. Cyril of Jerusalem point out, saying:

“O Christian, begin no work until you have blessed yourself with the sign of the holy Cross. When you set off on a journey, when you begin work, when you go to learn to read and write, when you are alone and when you are with people—seal your forehead, your body, your chest, your heart, your mouth, your eyes, and your ears with the holy Cross, and let everything be sealed with the sign of Christ’s victory over hell. Then you will no longer fear witchcraft, hexes, and spells, for they melt at the power of the Cross, like wax before a fire, like dust in the face of the wind.” <sup>1</sup>

1. Cf. St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Homily 107: On the Weapons of a Monk*; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Instructions* 13.36.

Thus, first we spoke of the meanings of the cross, and then of the twofold cross—material and spiritual.

#### **Schedule of Services**

**Thursday October 1<sup>st</sup> – [Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos](#)**

**8:45 am** – Hours

**9:00 am** – Divine Liturgy

#### **St. Demetrius Orthodox Church, Naples, FL & Bishop Gerasim Visit**

**Sunday, October 25th**

St. Demetrius Orthodox has a candidate for ordination to the diaconate. This ordination will take place at Holy Cross with Bishop Gerasim presiding. St. Demetrius’ parish will be joining our parish on this Sunday. Holy Cross will need to prepare for this very important event. Details to follow.

#### **Inquirers & Catechism Class**

Classes will be on Sundays following Divine Liturgy. For those new to understanding Orthodoxy or for those who want to expand your foundation, please join us for our classes. Please check the schedule for changes.

**[tithe.ly.com](https://tithe.ly.com)**

Another way to “donate”. This app can be downloaded to your phone, and Holy Cross can be accessed via this app. Also, [tithe.ly](https://tithe.ly) can be accessed through the church website [www.HolyCrossFtMyers.org](http://www.HolyCrossFtMyers.org)

### Prayer Requests

Patricia Jamison – Chad Willis’ Mother-in-law  
Don Jamison – Chad Willis’ Father-in-law  
Agape Brill  
Christina Robinson (mother of Agape Brill)  
Walter Kallaur – brother of the Constantine & Arlene Kallaur  
Anne and Scott Peatross  
Nicholas Kowalski  
Robert Kozera  
Megan – David & Phyllis Bartos’ daughter  
Rosemary – Friend of David & Phyllis Bartos

### Please pray for our families in Ukraine

Leonid, Nadiia, Andrii, Halyna,  
Volodymyr, Maryna, Dmytro, Bohdan,  
Nadiia, Oleksandr, Tetiana,  
Roman, Mykola  
Anatoly, Olga, Maria, Andrei  
Please let us know of anyone you would like to add to the Prayer Lists.

## The Divine Liturgy

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom  
Variable Hymns and Readings

### The First Antiphon

God, my God, attend to me! Why hast Thou forsaken me? *(Ps. 21:1a)*

***Refrain:*** Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

Why art Thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

*(Ps. 21:1b) (Refrain)*

O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; and by night but find no rest. *(Ps. 21:2) (Refrain)*

Thou dwellest in the sanctuary, the praise of Israel. *(Ps. 21:3) (Refrain)*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. *(Refrain)*

### The Second Antiphon

O God, why dost Thou cast us off forever? *(Ps. 73:1a)*

***Refrain:*** O Son of God, crucified in the flesh, save us who sing to Thee: Alleluia!

Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast gotten of old! *(Ps. 73:2)*

***(Refrain)***

Remember Mount Zion, where Thou hast dwelt! *(Ps. 73:3b) (Refrain)*

God is our King before the ages; He has worked salvation in the midst of the earth. *(Ps. 73:13) (Refrain)*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

*(“Only-begotten Son and immortal Word of God...”)*

### The Third Antiphon

The Lord reigns, let the people tremble! *(Ps. 98:1a)*

***Refrain:*** Tone 1 Troparion of the Feast

O Lord, save Thy people,

and bless Thine inheritance!

Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians

over their adversaries;

and by virtue of Thy Cross,//

preserve Thy habitation!

The Lord reigns, let the people tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! *(Ps. 98:1)*

***Troparion of the Feast***

The Lord is great in Zion; He is exalted over all the people. *(Ps. 98:2)*

***Troparion of the Feast***

Bow down in worship to the Lord in His holy court! *(Ps. 98:10)*

***Troparion of the Feast***

### Entrance Verse

Extol the Lord our God: worship at His footstool for He is holy! *(Ps. 98:5)*

***Troparion of the Feast***

**Tone 1 Troparion**

O Lord, save Thy people,  
and bless Thine inheritance!  
Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians  
over their adversaries;  
and by virtue of Thy Cross,//  
preserve Thy habitation!

**Tone 4 Kontakion**

As Thou wast voluntarily raised upon the Cross for our sake,  
grant mercy to those who are called by Thy Name, O Christ God;  
make all Orthodox Christians glad by Thy power,  
granting them victories over their adversaries//  
by bestowing on them the invincible trophy, Thy weapon of peace!

*(Instead of the Trisagion [Holy God...], we sing:)*

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

**Tone 7 Prokeimenon**

Extol the Lord our God: / worship at His footstool for He is holy! *(Ps. 98:5)*

*V. The Lord reigns, let the people tremble! (Ps. 98:1a)*

**1 Corinthians 1:18-24 (Epistle)**

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

**Tone 1**

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

*V. Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast gotten of old!  
(Ps. 73:2)*

*V. God is our King before the ages; He has worked salvation in the  
midst of the earth! (Ps. 73:12)*

**John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30-35 (Gospel)**

Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And

bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

### **Explanation of Today's Gospel Reading**

By Blessed Theophylact

Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

**6-7. Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."** Pilate is intimidated by the Jews and not eager to offend them. He takes Jesus out to them, making another attempt to calm them. But they are unmoved and shout, *Crucify, crucify Him!* Seeing all his efforts come to nothing, Pilate announces, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." He is desperate to set Jesus free, so he proposes that the Jews do exactly what they are not permitted to do. "I have the authority to crucify Him," he tells them, "but *I find no fault in Him*. You have no such authority but insist that He is guilty. So, you *take ... Him, and crucify Him*. Ah, you don't have the power to do this, you say? Then let Him go." Thus spoke Pilate, for he was a reasonable man, although one unwilling to put himself at risk for the truth. But the Jews, stung by his words, retort, *By our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God*. Behold, evil at odds with itself! Earlier Pilate had told them, *Take Him, and judge Him according to your law*; but they refused. Now they insist, *By our law He ought to die*. First they accuse Jesus of making Himself a king. That was shown to be a lie, so now they denounce Him for claiming to be the Son of God. But how is that a crime? If Christ does the works of God, what prevents Him from being the Son of God? Behold God's wondrous providence! In order to smear His reputation, the Jews hauled the Lord from one court to another, but they only succeed in shaming themselves. Careful investigation only makes Christ's innocence more obvious. How many times did Pilate declare he could find nothing to warrant Jesus' death!

**8-11. Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."** Pilate was afraid, merely hearing the words "*He is the Son of God* [v. 7.]" But the Jews had witnessed Christ's divine deeds; yet they sought to destroy Him when they should have bowed down in worship. Pilate questions Jesus again, "Where are You from? Who are You?" To this, Jesus makes no response. For He had already told Pilate, *To this end was I born* [John. 18:37], and, *My kingdom is not from hence* [John: 18:36]; but Pilate did not open his heart and mind to understand. The Lord remains silent, ignoring these questions as pointless, since Pilate is unwilling to resist the crowd and defend the truth. Thus, he proves himself to be utterly weak-willed and easily shaken by threats. If he feared the Jews, how much more ought he to have been terrified of Jesus, the Son of God! Behold, he is condemned by his own words: *I have power to crucify You, and power to release You*. If everything is in your power, Pilate, why then did you not release the man you found to be innocent? The Lord then curbs his arrogance: "*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above*. My death is not meaningless; rather, it is preordained in heaven to accomplish a secret, mystical purpose - the salvation of the world." The words *except it were given you from above* by no means relieve Pilate of responsibility before God. For the Lord adds, *the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin*. This shows that Pilate is also guilty, but to a lesser degree than the Jews.

**14-18. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.** We have commented several times that Pilate was more weak and timid than evil. Outwardly he appears to examine and judge but goes about it feebly. *Behold your king!* he declares, neither condemning Jesus nor openly rebuking the Jews. Indirectly he does reproach them as slanderers, saying in effect, "Behold the man you claim is attempting to become your king: a lowly, simple person who in fact has no aspirations to such a rank. Your accusation is

patently false. He has no wealth, no army, no nobles at His side. *Behold your king!* What are you hoping to gain by killing this powerless and harmless man?" This is what Pilate implied; but he did not act decisively as would a man fighting to defend the truth. The Jews cry, *Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!* pressing hard and demanding the cross, because they want to smear Christ's reputation forever by having Him executed in the most humiliating, accursed way possible. As it is written, *Everyone that is hung on a tree is cursed of God* [Dt. 21:23]. But they did not realize that, just as man's fall came about by a tree, so too by a tree would his lifting up and restoration be accomplished. Behold, the Jews recognize *no king but Caesar!* By voluntarily submitting to Roman power, they disavow God as their king; having removed themselves from God's care and protection, God abandons them to the cruelties of the very men they take as kings [with the result that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by the Romans forty years later]. *Then Pilate delivered Him therefore unto them to be crucified.* O foolish man! Timid and cowardly, he failed to exercise his authority as judge. *And He bearing His cross went forth.* It was considered a defilement - and therefore was forbidden - even to touch the wood of a cross used for execution, so they compelled the man they had condemned and cursed to carry on His back the accursed wood. The soldiers crucified Christ between two robbers, intending to make Him guilty by association, again with a view to ruining His good reputation. Doing so, they unwittingly fulfilled the prophecy, *He was numbered among the transgressors* [Is. 53:12]; and thus, by God's wisdom their intended insult only increased His glory. While hanging on the cross, the Lord brought salvation to a robber - a miracle as great as any He performed and one that shows that He is God. And so, He alone was glorified, although three were executed. It could not have happened like this unless He were innocent. He is the true Judge of the lawless and transcends every law.

**19-20. Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.** The *title* which Pilate wrote and fixed to the cross identified the man being executed and declared his crime. Pilate wrote this partly to retaliate against the Jews for disobeying him, partly to show that they were wicked rebels against their own king, and partly to defend Christ's reputation. Because the Jews deliberately crucified the Lord with robbers in order to besmirch His name, Pilate declares that Jesus is a king, not a thief. Earlier, the Evangelist mentioned certain Greeks who came to see Jesus [see Jn. 12:20]. Now Pilate writes the inscription in Greek as well as Hebrew and Latin, for the sake of the many Greeks present in the crowd

on account of the feast. He broadcasts the madness of the Jews in all three languages, making it plain to everyone. But even with Jesus hanging upon the cross, the Jews' hatred of Him is unquenchable. "*Write that He said, I am king of the Jews,*" they demanded. As written, the title was a condemnation of the Jews: but if the words **He said** had been added, then its meaning would have changed, and it would have accused Christ of impudence and arrogance. But Pilate held to his decision: *What I have written, I have written.* This inscription would later play a significant part in the unfolding of God's providence. After the crucifixion, the three crosses were buried together in the same place. Only the Lord's cross had an inscription and therefore could be distinguished from the other two. The fact that the inscription was written in three languages also has spiritual meaning, testifying that the Lord is sovereign over moral, natural, and divine philosophy. The Latin letters symbolize moral virtue; for Roman rule was based on courage and vigor, qualities the Romans preeminently displayed in their conduct of war. The Greek letters symbolize the natural world, to which the Greeks devoted much study. The Hebrew letters denote theology; for the revelation of divine knowledge was entrusted to the Hebrews.

**25-27. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.**

The Lord provides for His mother's welfare. Note that several women disciples were present at the cross, but the Lord makes provision only for His mother. Since He would soon depart from this life, and His mother would be grief-stricken and need protection, Jesus entrusts her to *the disciple*. Out of humility, the Evangelist omits his own name. Had he wanted to boast, he could have taken advantage of the opportunity to mention why he was loved so much by the Lord. Surely, the reason must have been compelling and wondrous, for the Lord honored John by making him His own brother. In fact, this was John's reward for keeping vigil by the suffering Christ. It is marvelous how calmly the Lord went about His work while hanging on the cross - caring for His mother, fulfilling prophecies, opening paradise to the thief. Again, this demonstrates His divine power. Before the crucifixion He agonized and sweated, revealing His human nature.

**28. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"** *Jesus knowing*, the Evangelist writes, *that all things were now accomplished.* This means, "When every

aspect of God's economy had been fulfilled." Such a different kind of death was His! Death could not come near His body until He Himself so willed. And only after *all things were ... accomplished* did He will it, confirming what He had earlier declared: "*I have power to lay My life down* [John. 10:18]." Then He says, *I thirst*, fulfilling yet another prophecy. The soldiers display their foul malice by offering Him vinegar to drink, which is what condemned criminals were given. Hyssop was added because it was poisonous.

**30. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.** When He had received the drink, He said, *It is finished*. This means: "Every prophecy is now fulfilled; nothing has been omitted; all is accomplished." At every moment, until the very end, the Lord acts calmly and with authority. Having completed everything, *He bowed His head, and gave up His Spirit*, meaning, He breathed His last. When we die, it is the opposite: first we breathe our last breath, then our head drops. By His every action, Christ confirms that He is Lord of death and has accomplished everything by His own power.

**31-34. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.** The Lord committed His soul to God the Father, showing us that the souls of the saints are not confined in the tombs. Rather, they fly into the arms of the Father of all; but the souls of sinners are cast down into hades, the place of punishment. Meanwhile, the Jews committed a heinous crime and then scrupulously observed their holy day. The Evangelist explains: *In order that the bodies should not remain upon the cross, the Jews besought Pilate ... that they might be taken away.* And why might they have wanted the legs broken? There are several possible explanations: First, so that if the robbers did survive crucifixion, they would be unable ever to resume their lawless ways. Second, the Jews did not want to appear to be vengeful murderers on the high day of the feast. And third, so that there would be no violation of the law commanding that a man's punishment end before sunset [see Dt. 21:22-23; Eph. 4:26]. Behold how the schemes of the Jews fulfill the prophecies - here, two at one stroke: The soldiers did not break Jesus' legs, but to please the Jews they pierced His side, and blood and water came forth.

Their aim was to insult even His corpse, but the affront resulted in a miracle. It is highly unusual that blood should gush from a corpse. That water also came forth is an indisputable miracle. It did not occur by chance. Within the Church, spiritual life is created and sustained by these two substances. By water we are born anew; by Christ's Body and Blood we are nourished. Therefore, when you approach the chalice of Communion containing the Blood of Christ, prepare yourself to drink as from His very side. The soldier's weapon is a type of *the fiery sword that turns about* [Gen. 3:25], barring us from paradise. A weapon thrust through the air continues on the path of its trajectory until it meets another object. When it buried itself in the Lord's side, the lance's movement stopped; so too will the swirling of the flaming sword cease, and it will no longer prevent us from entering paradise. Now the blood gushing out symbolizes the humanity of the Crucified One, and the water, His divinity. Let the Armenians be put to shame, for their priests do not add water to the wine when they prepare the Mysteries. Do they not understand the meaning of this miracle? Or do they imagine that blood alone gushed from the Lord's side!

**35. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.** "I did not hear this from others," the Evangelist John is saying. "I was there and witnessed it, and so my *record is true*." Indeed, John recounts all the humiliating insults that Jesus endured: he does not gloss over them or in any way minimize the Lord's abasement. In effect, he makes this argument: "My narrative is precise, accurate in every detail, and entirely free of bias. From this, know that it is true."

*(Instead of "It is truly meet...", we sing:)*

#### **Tone 8**

Magnify, O my soul, the most precious Cross of the Lord!

You are a mystical Paradise, O Theotokos,

who, though untilled, has brought forth Christ;

through Him the life-bearing wood of the Cross was planted on earth.

Now at its Exaltation,

as we bow in worship before it, we magnify you.

#### **Communion Hymn**

The light of Thy countenance has been signed upon us, O Lord. *(Ps. 4:7)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!