

Living Lent 4

Weekly Reflections by Metropolitan Tikhon

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon offers a series of reflections on the themes contained in the Triodion hymns sung on Monday of each week during Great Lent.



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We have now come to “the middle of the time of abstinence” and “have reached the veneration of the life-giving Cross of Christ.” In the common understanding, the Cross is often seen as a symbol of the great difficulties that face us in life: the cross of illness, the cross of painful relationships, the cross of a heavy personal burden. Although these difficulties are all too real, we are reminded this week that “the veneration of the Cross has come shining as the sun with the light of salvation...” making this a “holy week of light.”

The question then becomes: how do we, who are “held fast by the darkness of the passions” receive this light which is shed on us? How do we transform those difficulties into opportunities to return to Paradise? We are familiar with the liturgical depiction in which the flames of the fiery sword guarding Eden are quenched by the wood of the Cross; This is not simply a literary image but an expression of a spiritual truth.

The Lord Himself, through His Passion, has shown us that “the best path to exaltation is humility,” and He has reminded us, in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, that this is the best path for us as well. The Pharisee was rejected for his boasting but the “humble-minded Publican was justified through his silent prayer.” We are asked not only “to choose this humble-mindedness, but to accept it in our heart.”

It is in the heart of the humble that God’s grace comes to dwell, and one way to acquire this inner humility is to “humble the passions of the body through abstinence from food and the rejection of pleasures.” Our Lenten ascetical activities will not remove the difficulties from our lives, but they will help us learn the humility that brings God’s help.

In this way, we can sing with the hymnographer: “O brethren, having come to the middle of the Fast, in good courage, and with willing hearts, let us complete with God’s help the part which still remains, that in great joy we may behold the Passover of the risen Christ.”