



What Does the Holy Cross Teach us?

The Liturgical Calendar of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church during the months of September and October are full of church celebrations commemorating the revealed mysteries of the greatest love of God that was expressed to humankind: 'The Cross.'

In this liturgical season, our Church celebrates the following feasts relating to the Cross:

- 1st -Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
- 2nd -Barekandan of the Fast of Holy Cross of Varak**
- 3rd -Discovery of the Holy Cross**

All these feasts commemorate special events when the power of the Holy Cross was made manifest. The first deals with the recovery of the Holy Cross from the pagan Persians by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius I in 629, after the Persians sacked Jerusalem and took the Holy Cross captive. En route back to Jerusalem, the Holy Cross passed through the territory of Armenia amid national jubilation and spiritual renewal.

The second is of purely Armenian Origin and belongs only to the Armenian Liturgical Calendar, recounts the miraculous discovery of a relic from the Holy Cross at mount Varak by the Armenian hermits Hovel and Totik in 660. In order to avoid it falling into the hands of impious people, the relic was hidden in the mount by St. Hripsimeh when she was persecuted from Rome for her Christian faith by the Roman Emperor and came to seek refuge in Armenia.

The third recounts the miraculous discovery of the Holy Cross at the site of Golgotha by Queen Helene, the Queen mother of Constantine the Great in 326. In order to verify the true cross of Christ, amongst the other two belonging to the two thieves crucified with Him, the corpse of a child was laid successively on the three crosses and was vivified when placed on the Cross of Christ, thus revealing the true Cross.

All these feasts about the cross can teach us two most important aspects of Christian life: God's infinite love towards us and our requirement to follow him uncompromisingly.

It was on the Cross that the final stage of God's emptying himself and assuming a human form (Phil. 2:7) consummated. It is on the cross that God made it possible that our sins and human frailty be nailed and with the great sacrifice of Christ we became reconciled to God and to ourselves.

True discipleship to Christ is exemplified by our readiness to take the cross and follow him (Matt. 10:38, 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23, 14:27). Christ through his own example has shown us the way by ascending the Cross on the Golgotha. He showed us the way of the cross to be full with hardship, trials and tribulations but similarly he showed us this way to be a way of endurance, love, compassion and sacrifice for other humans like us.

The way of the cross requires from us an existential decision, and the Lord Jesus Christ knocking at the door of our hearts waits for a response from us to enter. But first of all we have to clear our inner room in order to make it a habitable place for Christ and the Holy Spirit to pitch His tent. We cannot commit ourselves mentally to the Cross if we do not take an existential decision from within and relinquish our material and egotistic attachments to this transient and material world. This precondition is unavoidable if we are going to commit ourselves and follow the command of Christ, 'Take your Cross and follow me'

The way of the Cross requires a total commitment to God and our fellow human beings. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.... And you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt. 22:37, 39). Whenever we cross ourselves with our three fingers representing the Holy, One and Inseparable Trinity, we must remind ourselves that we must love God with all our mind (the finger touching the forehead), also with all our might (the shoulders) with heart and soul (the chest), and consequently show this love to our fellow human beings. Thus, signing ourselves with the sign of the cross, can always remind us of the foremost commandment of Jesus. When we pray verbally or silently, it is our mind and heart that prays, but when we cross ourselves it is our body that prays.

We must always show our allegiance to Christ publicly, before other humans by exemplary character and lifestyle, and privately, by prayer and meditation so that we may become capable to draw away evil thoughts, influences or even powers by drawing on us the blessed sign of the cross. We can only be recognized as the sheep of Christ, by being signed by the sign of the Cross. Indeed, as humans stamp their sign on their cattle, thus proclaiming ownership, so also we were owned or were claimed ownership by Christ at our baptism, when we were stamped by his sign of the cross. Thus, we belong to our master Jesus Christ; let us keep this sign of cross intact on us and demonstrate to others that we belong to Christ.

Through His suffering on the Cross and Resurrection, Christ gave birth to the Church, from whose womb at our baptism we are born as Christians and children of God. Thus the Church sustains us as our spiritual mother and the Cross guides us in this life as a member of Christ's flock.

May God grant us the grace and the gifts through His Holy Spirit so that we become empowered to perform the deeds of the Cross and walk in the ways of righteousness and be worthy to be true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ for life everlasting. Amen.