

# KOINONIA:

A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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## PREACHING THE CROSS by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

*“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel – not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 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.”*

*(1 Corinthians 1:17-18)*

This has probably happened to every Orthodox priest in public: You are walking in your cassock and cross, and someone comes up to you and makes a comment, not only about your wardrobe, but also about the cross you are wearing. Sometimes, they may even make a remark along the lines of, “Why are you wearing an instrument of torture and death?” or “That is a symbol of oppression!” How can we respond, and why is the Cross so central to our witness of the Orthodox Faith?

Simply put, the Cross is NOT a symbol of oppression or death, or any such



meanings that may be ascribed to it. In fact, it is quite the opposite: the Cross is a symbol of life, freedom and love. But for those with a distorted view of the world and of Christianity, disdain is the reaction evoked by the Cross.

The Western view of the Cross does, in large part, see our Lord's Crucifixion as an act of atonement: the satisfaction of an angry Father in Heaven ... a punishment for a crime that humanity has committed. One can easily see how this warped understanding of the Cross can become widespread. Yet we as Orthodox see the Cross much differently.

The Cross is a sign of life, freedom, goodness, and, ultimately, love. God did not send His Son into the world to oppress His creation. God sent His Son into the world to redeem it, to reconnect it with Himself and ultimately to overturn our own slavery to death. As Fr. Thomas Hopko states, “So when Jesus dies, it is death which is put to death.” For this simple reason, we need to preach the Cross to the world: we need to share the Cross as the way of salvation and life.

St. Gregory the Theologian writes in his famous 2<sup>nd</sup> Paschal Oration, “We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him, because we were put to death with Him; we were glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him.” This *true* message of the Cross is what we must present to the world. The Cross is life, and Christ is “*the way, the truth and the life.*” (John 14:6)

## Understanding the Cross of Christ

*“When Jesus dies, it is death that is put to death. When light enters the darkness of the tomb, the darkness is overcome.”*

In the Eastern Church and in the Bible, the Cross itself is the glory. The Cross doesn't conceal God; the Cross reveals God, reveals God as love, as mercy, as forgiveness, as absolutely faithful to His creatures, as one like the mad lover in love with a harlot-whore, as the prophets would write: he's faithful to her even until death and comes after her and shows what he is. So Jesus shows us what, Who, and how [God is], and even *why* God, our real Abba-Father, is how He is.

Now, the Messiah is also King. He's the Messianic King. What does the king do? The king destroys the enemies. What are the enemies? The enemies are not the Canaanite people, the Moabites, the Jebusites, the Edomites, whom God slew back and forth if you read the Bible, but He [slew] them because they were idolaters. All the battles and blood of the Old Covenant [are] battles between gods, to prove that only YAHWEH,

the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, is the real God. He's the God of gods, the Lord of lords, and those terms will be applied to Jesus in the New Testament. In fact, the Gospel of Jesus applies everything that the Bible applies to God the Father to Jesus, in His divinity. But He reveals it in His humanity, His humiliation, and His death on the Cross.

So when Jesus dies, it is death that is put to death. When light enters the darkness of the tomb, the darkness is overcome. When righteousness is in touch with unrighteousness and injustice, it's the injustice that is destroyed. When what is innocent and pure is entering into what is ugly and unholy, it's the unholy that is defeated. It's the unholy that is defeated. And the only way that God can do this is by sending his Son in the form of a slave to die on the Cross, so that He could become a curse for us, [become] sin for us – these are all the words of St. Paul –

become a humiliated slave for us. (Gal 3:13) That becomes, then, what the Holy Fathers call the “blesse[d] exchange.”

He who is powerful becomes weak; through His weakness, His power is victorious. He who owns everything, [He who] is rich, becomes totally poor; through His poverty the riches of God are given. Through His being shut up in the darkness of the tomb, the light of God comes and destroys that darkness. And ultimately when He dies, He is the one who is victorious. So the main hymn of Pascha, in the Orthodox Church, is: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”

*Excerpt from Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko, “Understanding the Cross of Christ,” Ancient Faith Radio Podcast, August 2009. Link: [Understanding the Cross of Christ - Fr. Thomas Hopko Lectures | Ancient Faith Ministries](#)*

## On the Sunday of the Cross

*“The Life-Giving Cross was planted in our midst by the Holy Fathers to give us rest and refreshment, to make us light and courageous for the remaining task.”*

The Life-Giving Cross is presented to us for refreshment and assurance, for remembrance of our Lord's Passion, and for comfort; the Life-Giving Cross was planted in our midst by the Holy Fathers to give us rest and refreshment, to make us light and courageous for the remaining task.... Or, to give another example: when a king is coming, at first his banner and symbols appear, then he himself comes glad and rejoicing about his victory and filling with joy those under him;

likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is about to show us His victory over death, and appear to us in the glory of the Resurrection Day, is sending to us in advance His scepter, the royal symbol – the Life-Giving Cross – and it fills us with joy and makes us ready to meet, inasmuch as it is possible for us, the King himself, and to render glory to His victory. ... But Christ comforts us who are, as it were, in a desert, until He shall lead us up to the spiritual Jerusalem by His

Resurrection ... for the Cross is called the Tree of Life, it is the tree that was planted in Paradise, and for this reason our fathers have planted it in the midst of Holy Lent, remembering both Adam's bliss and how he was deprived of it, remembering also that, partaking of this Tree, we no longer die but are kept alive.

From the *Synaxarion*, as quoted by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in *Great Lent: A Journey to Pascha* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 77.

## From the Fathers: “Second Paschal Oration” by St. Gregory the Theologian

XXVIII. It is now needful for us to sum up our discourse as follows: We were created that we might be made happy. We were made happy when we were created. We were entrusted with Paradise that we might enjoy life. We received a Commandment that we might obtain a good repute by keeping it; not that God did not know what would take place, but because He had laid down the law of Free Will. We were deceived because we were the objects of envy. We were cast out because we transgressed. We fasted because we refused to fast, being overpowered by the Tree of Knowledge. For the Commandment was ancient, it was [contemporary] with ourselves, and was a kind of education of our souls and a curbing of luxury, to which we were reasonably made subject, in order that we might recover, by keeping it, that which we had lost by not keeping it. We needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him, because we were put to death with Him; we were glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him.



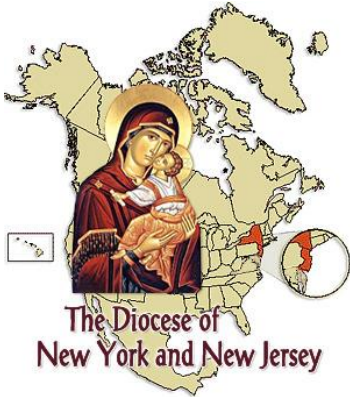
XXIX. Many indeed are the miracles of that time: God crucified; the sun darkened and again rekindled, for it was fitting that the creatures should suffer with their Creator; the veil rent; the Blood and Water shed from His Side; the one as from a man, the other as above man; the rocks rent for the Rock's sake; the dead raised for a pledge of the final Resurrection of all men; the Signs at the Sepulcher and after the Sepulcher, which none can worthily celebrate; and yet none of these equal to the Miracle of my salvation. A few drops of Blood recreate the whole world ... drawing us together and compressing us into unity.

XXX. But, O Pascha, great and holy ... purifier of all the world – for I will speak to you as to a living person – O Word of God and Light and Life and Wisdom and Might – for I rejoice in all Your names – O Offspring and Expression and Signet of the Great Mind; O Word conceived and Man contemplated, Who bears all things, binding them by the Word of Your power; receive this discourse, not now as first fruits, but perhaps as the completion of my offerings, a thanksgiving, and at the same time a supplication, that we may suffer no evil beyond those necessary and sacred cares in which our life has been passed; and stay the tyranny of the body over us (You see, O Lord, how great it is and how it bows me down); or Your own sentence, if we are to be condemned by You. But if we are to be released, in accordance with our desire, and be received into the Heavenly Tabernacle, there too it may be that we shall offer You acceptable Sacrifices upon Your Altar, to Father and Word and Holy Spirit; for to You belongs all glory and honor and might, world without end. Amen.

*“We needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live.”*

St. Gregory the Theologian,  
Second Paschal Oration  
**CHURCH FATHERS:**  
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310245.htm>





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**For those traveling in  
the Oneonta area:**  
Services at St. Innocent  
Mission are held in the  
lower level of St. James  
Episcopal Church,  
at 305 Main Street,  
Oneonta, New York  
(corner of Elm Street).  
Saturday Vespers, 5 PM;  
Sunday Liturgy, 9 AM.

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## City in the Hills

By Fr. John Morris, St. Innocent Mission, Oneonta, NY



When I first arrived at St. Innocent of Alaska Orthodox Mission in Oneonta, I found a small community devoted to Christ and His Church. We are converts and cradle Orthodox Christians of varying backgrounds, professions, hobbies and interests, yet we all assemble together seeking to worship in the true Faith. In this parish, my ethnic background is unimportant, in a good way.

Although we are a small group, we are a mixed group. In our diversity, Christ has united us. Much like the Parthians, Elamites, etc., mentioned in Acts 2, here we are Greeks, Puerto Ricans, etc., united in faith and devotion to Christ.

But our community in the “city of the hills” cannot be hidden; our candle cannot be placed under a basket. We are entering a new chapter here at St. Innocent. Our focus is to show others the light of Christ. It would be a tragedy to keep the worship of our God a secret from the rest of this city. Our hope is to no longer be the best kept secret in Oneonta. Again, like the disciples on Pentecost, we seek the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and allow us to spread the Gospel of Christ across this city.

To evangelize is part of our calling as Christians. Sharing the Good News is part of what it means to be the Church.

Fortunately, with two colleges and a few local businesses, we have plentiful fields to harvest. Many faith groups are present in this city, but there is only one Orthodox Church. This gives our mission in Oneonta a great urgency.

We plan to give our fellow Oneontans as many opportunities as possible to “come and see” the true Faith. In addition to our weekly Men’s Group, and the growing of more parish ministries, we will continue to add liturgical services to our calendar so that we are fed through fellowship and prayer – and so that we in turn may feed and enrich our neighbors. Glory to God for all things!

For more information on St. Innocent Mission, visit [www.stinnocentmission.org](http://www.stinnocentmission.org)