

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

THIRD SUNDAY of LENT

On this day, the Third Sunday of the Great Fast, we celebrate the Veneration of the Precious and Life-giving Cross.

Verses

Let the whole earth venerate the Cross,
Through which it learned to worship Thee, O Word.

Synaxarion

Since through the forty-day Fast we are also crucified in a certain way, deadened as we are by the passions, and feel a sense of bitterness, so that we become exhausted and fall down, for this reason the Precious and Life-giving Cross is set forth, to refresh and strengthen us, and to remind us of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It exhorts us with this thought: If our God was crucified for us, how much ought we to do for Him! It lightens our burdens by comparing them with the afflictions of the Master. It reminds us of the glory that comes through the Cross and gives us the hope of this glory. For, as our Savior ascended the Cross and was glorified through being led around dishonorably and by the bitter treatment that He received, so must we also act, in order that we may be glorified with Him, even if we suffer some unpleasantness for a time.

And we venerate the Cross in other ways. Just as those who traverse a rough and lengthy road and have grown faint through weariness, if they should happen to find a tree that affords plenty of shade, sit down for a while and are refreshed, and, as if rejuvenated, accomplish the remainder of the journey; so now in the season of the Fast and on the laborious road that we traverse, the Life-bearing Cross was planted in the midst by the Holy Fathers, providing us with relaxation and refreshment and making those who have become weary well-equipped and nimble for the subsequent toil. Or, just as at the coming of a king, his banners and scepters precede him, and then he arrives in person, rejoicing and taking delight in his victory and at the same time making his subjects glad; even so our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is soon going to display the Trophy of victory over death and come forth in glory on the day of Resurrection, has sent His scepter in advance, the roy-

al Banner, the Life-giving Cross, preparing us to make ready and welcome Him soon as King, and to praise Him Who has gloriously triumphed.

By the middle week of Holy Lent, the holy period of forty days resembles the spring of Marah because of the discipline that we apply to our bodies and because of the bitterness and weariness that are in us as a result of fasting. Therefore, just as the Divine Moses threw the tree into the middle of that spring and made it sweet, so also God, Who has led us through the noetic Red Sea and away from Pharaoh, sweetens the bitterness from the forty days of fasting with the life-giving Tree of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, consoling us as we spend time in the desert until He leads us up to the noetic Jerusalem through His Resurrection.

Or, since the Cross is called the Tree of Life and is this Tree, and since the Tree of Life was planted in the middle of the Paradise of Eden, it was appropriate that the most Divine Fathers should plant the Tree of the Cross in the middle of the holy forty days, thereby simultaneously reminding us of Adam's gluttony and describing his restoration through the Tree of the Cross. For if we taste of this Tree, we shall no longer die, but be made alive.

By the power of Thy Cross, O Christ our God, protect us from the assaults of the Evil One, and vouchsafe us, having passed through the arena of the forty days with ease, to venerate Thy Divine Passion and Thy Life-bearing Resurrection; and have mercy on us, for Thou alone art good and lovest mankind.

