



DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *Mark 8:34-38; 9:1*

"Take up your cross and follow me."

Fr. George Parsenios



We should never become too comfortable with the cross. Some people recognize that the cross is a disturbing image, so they tell us that wearing a cross around our necks is like wearing an electric chair. Even that image is too weak. The cross was not merely a tool of execution. Crucifixion was employed to terrify those who beheld the crucified, because crucified figures usually died slowly from exposure to the elements and from exhaustion. Roman citizens were never supposed to be punished by being crucified, because the death was so demeaning and dehumanizing. The cross was reserved for slaves and bandits and revolutionaries and other people who threatened the social order. Pontius Pilate placed a placard on Jesus' cross calling him "King of the Jews," indicating that Jesus was crucified for being just such a threat to the Roman political and social order. If the matter ended there, the cross would be an image only of darkness and defeat. But the death of Jesus did not end in death. Jesus rose from the dead, transforming the cross into a symbol of triumph and glory. The Gospel of John says that Jesus is "exalted" on the cross (John 12:32) and refers to his crucifixion as his "glorification" (12:23). We wear and venerate crosses, therefore, and we decorate our Churches and our houses with crosses because they remind us that the cross is the vehicle of our salvation. Most important, Jesus tells us to take up our own cross, which means to live a new and different life. But when you carry your cross by forgiving and by loving and by living the highest ethical life, you do not feel defeated and broken and embittered. Like our Lord, you are exalted and glorified.

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Diakonia is made possible by a generous grant from Leadership 100

FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Hairesis (Αἵρεσις) What is “Heresy?”

Fr. George Parsenios



The Greek word *αἵρεσις*/*hairesis* had a long history before it carries gained the negative sense of “heresy” in Christian theology. The noun *αἵρεσις*/*hairesis* comes from the verb *αἰρέω*/*haireo*, which means to grasp something or to choose something. A

hairesis is a choice. In Greek philosophy, the different schools of thought were different “choices,” and so came to be called different *haireseis* (plural of *hairesis*). The term had no negative sense whatsoever, and could well be translated into English as “philosophical school” or “ideological

sect.” The Jewish author Josephus relied on this term to show that the Jews were fully compatible with Greeks and Romans. In the same way that Greek and Roman philosophy was divided into different *haireseis*, Josephus said that the Pharisees and Sadducees were different *haireseis* of the Jewish way of life. This neutral sense of the term as a philosophical choice, however, disappeared in Christian theology in the 2nd century. When Gnostics and others rejected the authority and teaching of the apostolic tradition and formed their own “schools” of thought, this *hairesis* was no longer a neutral “choice” but rather an active denial of what had been revealed by Christ. Thus evolved the negative sense of “heresy.”

THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

St. Patrick the Enlightener of Ireland



Saint Patrick, remembered as the Apostle of the Irish, was born in Roman Britain in the late fourth century. Around A.D. 401, at the age of sixteen, he was seized by Irish raiders and carried into slavery in Ireland. Though the son of a deacon and grandson of a priest, it was during his six years of captivity (401–407) that he experienced a profound conversion. As he later wrote in his *Confession*, he prayed constantly while tending sheep, rising before dawn in snow, frost, and rain, strengthened by a deepening love and fear of God.

In about 407 he escaped and eventually traveled to Gaul, where he pursued monastic formation at Auxerre under Germanus of Auxerre. Ordained bishop, he returned to Ireland around 432 as a missionary. Despite hardship and danger, his labor bore remarkable fruit. By the time of his death on March 17, 461, Ireland had been transformed from a pagan land into a firmly established Christian nation.

File:Icon of Saint Patrick, Christ the Saviour Church.jpg. (2025, December 1). *Wikimedia Commons*. Retrieved February 24, 2026, from https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Icon_of_Saint_Patrick,_Christ_the_Saviour_Church.jpg&oldid=1124085097.

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY CROSS

Strength for the Journey

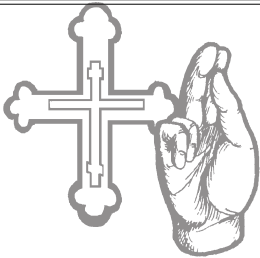
Eva Konstantakos



Halfway through Lent, the Cross is placed at the center of the Church as a sign of hope and strength. It reminds us that sacrifice leads to life and that God's love is stronger than suffering. The Cross is not merely a symbol—it is the victory of Christ over sin and death.

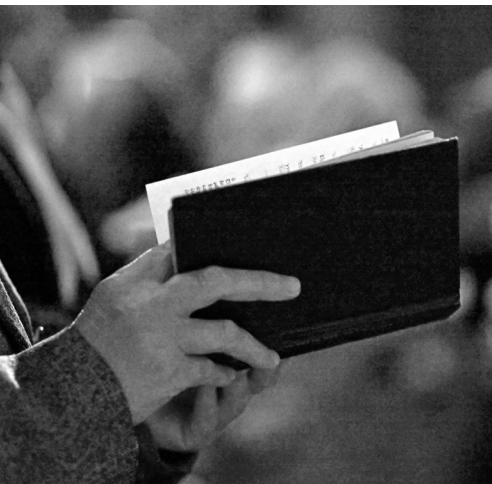
Life can feel heavy, but the Cross teaches us that we are never alone. Christ carried His Cross for us, and He walks with us through every challenge. As Jesus said, *"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Mark 8:34, RSV). St. John Chrysostom wrote, *"The Cross is the trophy of victory over the devil, the sword that pierced him."*

Lent is not about perfection—it's about perseverance. The Cross stands as a reminder that every struggle can lead to transformation when united with Christ.



Personal Challenge:

When you feel stressed or overwhelmed, pause and make the sign of the Cross. Whisper a prayer: *"Lord, by Your Cross, strengthen me."* You could also read (or sing) the Apolytikion of the Holy Cross. Let this simple act remind you that God is with you and will give you strength to endure and overcome.



Becoming A Living Bible

In private study, when a Christian profitably reads the Bible, receiving inspiration and strength from it, family members, friends, relatives and even acquaintances will inevitably notice the difference. Any person who comes into contact with such a Christian cannot but notice the growing peace, love and inner assurance—the spirit of Christ—in that Christian, and will frequently ask (if not ask, certainly think) what gives that person such strength and radiance. God will provide many opportunities to the growing Christian for sharing with others his or her experience with the Bible. What better witness for the truth of the Christian faith than a solid Christian life nourished by Holy Scripture and radiating true Christian love at home, at Church and at work? The Christian's own life becomes a kind of gospel, a living Bible, in which other people observe, read and experience the truths of God in action.

From ***Bread for Life***, by Father Theodore Stylianopoulos
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Religious Education



Just For Kids! (...and the young at heart)

MARCH 15: **The Sunday of The Holy Cross**

One day, Jesus said something very important to His friends. He told them, if they want to follow him, they need to be brave. This teaches us that sometimes we need to be willing to give up what we want, and do something that is hard, just like carrying a heavy cross. He explained that if we try to hold on to our life and only think about ourselves, we will lose what is truly important. But if we give our life for Him and the good news, we will find a life that lasts forever! What good is it to have everything we want in the world, but lose what really matters? Jesus tells us that if someone is too shy or embarrassed to tell others about Him, then He will be ashamed of them when He comes back in glory with His angels. Following Jesus will not always be easy, but it's the best choice we can make because it leads us to a life full of God's love and power.



From the Kids' Sunday Sermon Series Department of Religious Education

H	E	F	L	S	I	V	L	V	K	F	Y	H	L	L
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Find these words:

JESUS	ANGELS
FRIENDS	KINGDOM
FOLLOW	POWER
BRAVE	GOD
CROSS	LOVE
LIFE	CHOICE
IMPORTANT	CARRY
FOREVER	HEAVY
WORLD	GIVE
GLORY	HOLD