



Simple Catechism Within the Experience of the Orthodox Church



Your Cross And the Cross of Christ

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**For my yoke is easy
and my burden is light**

Your Cross And the Cross of Christ*

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The Lord said to His Disciples:

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

(St. Matthew 16:24).

What is meant by “his cross”? **A**nd why is “his cross”—that is, the personal cross of every one of us—also called the “Cross of Christ”?

For each of us, “his cross” signifies the afflictions and sorrows that we undergo in our earthly life—afflictions and sorrows that are our own.

For each of us, “his cross” signifies fasting, vigil, and other deeds of piety, by which the flesh is humbled and brought into subjection to the spirit. **T**hese deeds must be carried out in accordance with each person’s strength, and thus are also personal to us.



For each of us, “his cross” signifies our sinful failings and passions; these again are our own. **W**ith some we are born, whereas others we acquire over the course of our earthly life.

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The Cross of Christ is the teaching of Christ.

No matter how heavy is the cross that we bear in following Christ, it brings us no profit and bears no fruit inasmuch as it is not transformed into the Cross of Christ.

For the disciple of Christ, “his cross” becomes the Cross of Christ. The disciple of Christ is firmly convinced that He constantly keeps watch over him; that He permits all afflictions as an indispensable and inevitable element of Christian identity; that no sorrows would approach him without the dispensation of Christ; and that by way of tribulations he becomes like unto Christ, participating in His sufferings on earth, that he might also become a participant in His glory in Heaven (cf. Romans 8:17).

For the disciple of Christ, “his cross” becomes the Cross of Christ. The true disciple of Christ has as his sole purpose in life the fulfillment of His Commandments. The Holy Commandments of Christ become for His disciple a cross upon which he constantly crucifies his sinful “old” self, “with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

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Hence, it becomes evident that to bear our cross and follow Christ we must deny ourselves even to the point of losing our own lives.

Sin has penetrated our fallen nature so deeply and thoroughly that the Word of God does not refrain from calling it *the soul of fallen man*.

In order to bear our cross, we must **first** deny our body the gratification of its fickle desires, offering it only what is essential for its needs. **Second**, we must acknowledge that our





own “rights” are the greatest wrongs and that our “rational thought” is utterly irrational in the eyes of God. **Third**, we must place ourselves in God’s hands with unswerving faith and devote ourselves to careful meditation on the Holy Scriptures, while denying our own will.

Whoever denies himself in this way is in a position to bear his cross.

With a spirit of submission to God and invoking His aid, which comes to assist him in his weakness, such a person fearlessly and unflinchingly beholds approaching tribulations and courageously prepares himself to endure them. **He** aspires thereby to participate in the Passion of Christ and to attain to confession of Him: a mystical confession of mind and heart, but also a manifest confession by his deeds and his very life.

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As long as our cross remains solely our own, it is very heavy. **When**, however, it is transformed into the Cross of Christ, it becomes exceedingly light. “**F**or My yoke is easy and my burden is light,” said our Lord (St. Matthew 11:30).

The cross is placed on the shoulders of the disciple of Christ when he acknowledges that he is worthy of his afflictions sent to him by the Providence of God.

The disciple of Christ rightly bears his cross when he accepts that precisely these tribulations, and not others, are needful for his transformation into the likeness of Christ and for his salvation.

We lift our cross with fortitude when we clearly perceive and understand our sinfulness. **In** such awareness, there is no place for self-deception. **If**, however, you admit that you

are sinful but grumble about your cross, you thereby demonstrate that you have only superficial consciousness of your sinfulness and are deluding yourself.

Bravely bearing our cross is true repentance.

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You who are crucified on the cross, confess to the Lord that His judgments are infallible. **C**ondemn yourself, acknowledge the judgements of God, and you will receive remission of your sins.

You who are crucified on the cross, come to know Christ, and the gates of Paradise will be opened unto you.

From your cross, glorify the Lord and reject as unlawful and blasphemous every thought of complaint or grumbling.

From your cross, thank the Lord for His inestimable gift; that is, for giving you the possibility to imitate Him by means of your suffering.

From your cross, theologize; for the cross is the only true school and treasure, and the loftiest throne of genuine theology. **W**ithout the cross there can be no living knowledge of God.

“Do not look [for the law of freedom] being perfected through human virtues; perfection is not found therein; its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ” (St. Mark the Ascetic, *On the Spiritual Law*).

The cross of the disciple of Christ is transformed into the Cross of Christ when he bears it with genuine consciousness of his sinfulness—which is in need of chastisement—in a spirit of thanksgiving and glorification of the Lord. **F**rom thanksgiving and glorification the sufferer receives spiritual





consolation. **T**hanksgiving and glorification become abundant sources of ineffable and eternal joy, which well up beneficially in his heart, gushing forth into his soul and body.

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To carnal people, the Cross of Christ appears unbearable. **F**or the disciple and follower of Christ, on the other hand, it is a path of inexpressible spiritual gladness. **S**o great is this joy, that it completely eradicates sorrow, such that the follower of Christ, even in the midst of the worst torments, feels only gladness.

(See, for example, the Martyrdom of St. Eustratios [December 13] and his prayer at the Midnight Office for Saturdays.)

The young St. Mavra said to her husband, St. Timothy, who called her to martyrdom as he himself was bravely enduring dreadful tortures for his faith in Christ: “**I** fear, my brother, lest I lose courage when I see the instruments of torture and the enraged governor. I am afraid lest I give way on account of my youth.”

St. Timothy answered her: “**P**lace your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and the tortures will become like oil poured out upon your body; they will become a breath of fresh air, which will alleviate your pains.”

(See the Martyrdom of Sts. Timothy and Mavra, May 3).

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The Cross is the strength and glory of the Saints throughout the ages.

The Cross is the healer of passions and the annihilator of the demons.

Deadly is their cross for those who have not taken pains to transform it into the Cross of Christ; for those who have grumbled and blasphemed against Divine Providence from

their cross; for those who give themselves over to desperation and despair.

Sinners who have no consciousness of their sinfulness, and thus no repentance, die eternally on their cross and, from their lack of self-awareness and fortitude, are deprived of true life—life together with God. **T**heir souls are taken down from the cross of sorrows only dead, to be thrown into the eternal grave of Hades.

The Cross of Christ raises from the earth the crucified disciple of Christ. **T**he disciple of Christ, nailed on his cross and the Cross of Christ, has his thoughts turned to the eternal and imperishable good things; with his mind and heart he lives in Heaven and beholds the mysteries of the Spirit in Jesus Christ our God.

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

(St. Matthew 16:24)

Amen.



The Prayer of St. Eustratios

Magnifying I magnify Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast looked upon my lowliness and hast not shut me up in the hands of enemies, but hast saved my soul out of necessities.

And now, O Master, let Thy hand shelter me and let Thy mercy come upon me; for my soul is troubled and in distress at its departure from my wretched and defiled body, lest the counsel of the adversary come upon it and hinder it because of the sins I have committed in this life, whether in knowledge or in ignorance.

Be merciful unto me, O Master, and let not my soul behold the dark countenance of the wicked demons, but may Thy radiant and luminous Angels receive it.

Give glory to Thy holy name, and by Thy might lead me unto Thy divine judgment seat.

When I am to be judged, let not the hand of the prince of this world seize and drag me, a sinner, into the depths of Hades; but do Thou stand by me, and be unto me a Savior and Helper.

Have mercy, O Lord, on my soul which hath been defiled by the passions of this life, and receive it cleansed by means of repentance and confession; for Thou art blessed unto the ages of ages. **A**men.

(*) *Ascetic Experiences*, Vol. I, Homily 37. Translated from the Greek. Publication layout ours.

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