

destroyed, the power of death is swallowed up, and we are raised up from earth to heaven. You are an invincible weapon, the subjugator of demons, the glory of the martyrs, the true ornament of the saints, the refuge of salvation...”

By placing the Holy Cross before us on this holy day, the Church reminds us of our obligation to venerate, to love and to confess the Holy Cross. In his fourth catechesis, St. Cyril of Jerusalem admonishes us, “Do not be ashamed of the Cross of Christ, even if some hide it, nevertheless, you trace it clearly upon your forehead so that the demons, seeing the royal sign, may tremble and flee far away. Make this sign when you eat and when you drink, when you sit, and when you lie down, when you rise or walk, in a word add every occasion. “

In summary, Saint John Chrysostom, in a sermon on the cross, speaks of its for us: “The Cross is a trophy against the demons, a weapon against sin, a sword with which Christ pierced the serpent. The Cross is the will of the Father, the glory of the Only-Begotten One, the joy of the Spirit, the tournament of the angels, the fortress of the Church, the glory of Paul, the stronghold of the saints, the light of the whole world.

“The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

The Holy Cross is an living symbol of God’s everlasting love for us, a symbol of the total self-sacrifice of Christ, of our redemption and salvation, as well as a symbol of His victory over Satan and death. By venerating the Holy Cross, we honor Christ’s sacrifice, and His passion and death. Whenever we make the sign of the cross upon ourselves, we profess our faith in our Savior.

The Eastern Church holds the veneration of the Holy Cross in such high regard that it has dedicated several feasts during the year to its honor. The greatest of these is the Feast of the Universal Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross. In an effort to understand this holy day, we should consider the history of its institution and the various rituals connected with it.

The History of the Institution of the Feast

The Feast of the Exultation of the Venerable Cross is a very ancient celebration. Its history has been obscured by various stories, and it is not easy to separate historical fact from pious legend. In celebrating this feast, we are not concerned with the ordinary veneration of the Holy Cross, which takes place on the third Sunday of Great Lent, but instead, with the aspect of the feast, expressed in its name, that is elevation of the cross, which is a special and solemn rite attributed to its veneration and glorification.

Historians of the Eastern Church generally agree that two particular events gave rise to the institution of this holy day: the finding of the Holy Cross of the Lord in the fourth century and its recovery from Persian captivity in the seventh century. The institution of the Feast was preceded by the discovery of the sacred wood of the Cross. Christian tradition has passed down several different legends about the discovery of the Holy Cross, which is believed to to have occurred in 326 AD, attributed to Saint Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine the Great. Historians who mention the finding of the Holy Cross say nothing about its first exaltation

immediately after its discovery, nor does pious tradition give any account of it. Rather, the Feast of the Exaltation owes its origin to the consecration of the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, which was erected on the site of our Lord's crucifixion by Saint Helen. The consecration was celebrated on September 13, 335 AD, while Makarios was Patriarch of Jerusalem, and on the following day, the solemn elevation of the sacred wood took place. During its elevation, the people exclaimed, "Lord have mercy" many times. Since then, the Eastern Church has celebrated the consecration of the Church the Resurrection on September 13th and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14th, which corresponds to September 27th on the Julian Calendar.

The second important event which rendered the feast universal in the East as well in the West, is the return or recovery of the sacred wood of the Cross from Persian captivity. The Persian king Chosroes had captured Jerusalem in 614 AD and carried off the Lord's Cross to the Persian capital; 14 years later, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, conquered the Persians and recovered the sacred Cross, returning it to Jerusalem, where on September 14th, a second solemn celebration of the elevation of the Holy Cross took place. It was then that the entire Church recognized this holy day universally. From that time on, the holy day has been called officially the Universal Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross." Since this feast calls to mind the Crucifixion and Death of Christ, it is given equal rank with Good Friday, and it is the custom of the Church, from the earliest times, to observe a strict day of fasting. The Feast of the Exaltation is one of the 12 Great Feasts of our Church and has a one day pre-feast and a seven day post-feast.

Besides the Feast of the Exaltation, our Church also honors to the Sacred Cross on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross during Great Lent, when it is carried out during the Matins Service for veneration without the rite of elevation or being raised up. This ritual of elevation is reserved only for the Feast of the Exaltation.

The Rite of Exaltation

A unique feature of the Feast of the Exaltation is the solemn public veneration of the Holy Cross by a separate ritual of elevation during the Matins service which evolved in various ways through the ages in the Eastern Church.

As concerns our Ukrainian traditions, this ritual was already mentioned in 13th century liturgical documents. In ancient Ukraine-Rus', the elevation of the Holy Cross took place only in the cathedrals where there was a bishop and many priests., but he patriarchal synod of 1276 permitted this rite to be performed in all churches. Metropolitan Ciprian of Kyiv, who reigned in the 14th century, instructed his clergy, writing: "...as regards the elevation of the Venerable Cross, the Cross is raised for glory in every church throughout the land where Christians live, even though there is only one priest." Documents of the 15th and 16th centuries give a description of the rite of Elevation of the Cross, which was carried out during the Great Doxology in the Matins Service and the petitions of the Fervent Litany were sung during the Elevation. There were five elevations, one at each side of the Tetrapod, and one last elevation was made toward the east. During each elevation the people sang, "Lord have mercy" one hundred times. The ritual ended with prostrations and the kissing of the Holy Cross while the Kontakion was sung. Finally, the faithful all joined in singing, "Before Your cross, O Master, We bow down in worship, and your holy Resurrection, we glorify. " In Halychyna (Galicia), that is, western Ukraine, instead of "Lord have mercy" being sung 100 times, it was only sung 24 times at each elevation.

The service of the Feast of the Exultation is, strictly speaking, one glorious hymn, in which the Holy Cross is continuously praised and glorified as the sign of victory, power and salvation. During the Vespers service the Stichyry and the Aposticha exclaims: "Rejoice, Oh Life-Giving Cross, invincible victory of religion, gate to paradise, fortress of the faithful, defense of the church. Through you, corruption is utterly