

# Homily on the Third Sunday of Great Lent

**Fr. Filip Lommaert                      Sunday, March 15, 2026**

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Today, on the third Sunday of Great Lent we listened to the Gospel reading of Saint Mark, dealing with Jesus' First Prophecy of His Passion.

Today is also the halfway mark of the season of Great Lent. It is also the day where we venerate that great symbol of victory, that great sign of hope, the cross of our Lord.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, following "Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore, the Cross will be brought in a solemn procession to the centre of the church. It is noteworthy that the theme of the Cross which dominates the hymnology today is not one of suffering, but one of victory and joy.

On the third Sunday of Great Lent, we come face to face with the paradox of our salvation: the terrible and horrible instrument used to torture and kill Christ has become the means of His victory over sin and death. The cross is, in the theology of the Church, "the trophy invincible, the weapon of peace" because by it we gain eternal peace.

Today, we as Orthodox Christians wear our crosses around our necks and display them in our churches and homes. This was not always the case. During the first century the cross was one of the most gruesome instruments of execution used by the Romans. It was used to serve as a statement: all who were condemned to crucifixion would die long, painful, and shameful deaths.

The cross was the means of the Romans to strike fear in the hearts of would-be traitors and rebels. In those days, no one in his right mind would have thought to honour the cross in any way, and certainly no one thought that God's Messiah would die on a cross.

This instrument of Roman torture and violence, on which Christ was nailed, has become the all-powerful symbol and witness of the healing from sin and the downfall of death.

But especially today, we must go beyond recognizing what Christ has accomplished for the universe and consider what He has accomplished for us and very importantly, how we are responding to His call. We need to ask ourselves, "What does the power of the cross mean for us today?"

For too many of us, it seems to have lost all its power. Oh yes, we still wear crosses around our neck, but somehow its real meaning seems to have been lost. It is a heirloom or something of sentimental value, because it was given by a loved relative or friend. Some wear their cross out of sheer habit or custom. Some even think that it is a cool fashion accessory.

Why is that? Because, we have forgotten or we have just stopped thinking about what that cross really means to us. We are far too busy with our personal lives in the modern world. And, the other way around, the world is keeping us far too busy with worldly pursuits. We only seem to concentrate on wanting material things and wanting them now.

Most people unfortunately seem to follow this one line from I Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 32: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow, we die!” (I Cor. 15:32). There is no place in their lives for God.

And even for those who try and live a sound Christian life, things are made difficult. Temptation is never far away, and we cannot escape the material world around us. It is easier to enjoy an easy life, indulge in modern comforts and overindulgence. If we have such a hectic social life during the weekends and do not make it to church on Sunday morning; it is nothing to get too worked up about.

Let us enjoy a lie-in and we can always make up for it the next Sunday. We are seduced into thinking that the solution to all our problems is to earn and have more money, more financial security, and that to ease our busy life schedules and modern-day stress we need to focus more on ourselves and our own self-pleasure.

I say to you: Take heed! Christ’s words should make you think otherwise when he asks: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul?”

This should make alarm bells ring. That is why we need the cross. The cross is a reminder of selflessness and the greatest love that ever was – that willing, voluntary gift of Christ Himself, His self-sacrifice for the salvation of the world: the ultimate example of God’s love for mankind.

We need to let go of our fixation on the material world and on ourselves and instead give ourselves over to a life in Christ, a life where we love God as He loves us.

That is why Christ asks us today “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

Those Christians who choose to lead a life dedicated to love and serve God, those who learn how to live in the light of His truth, those who learn to overcome the passions, even if it is a very slow and at times very painful process, they can become the glorified and adopted children of God which He created us to be.

What we must do is give up our relentless pursuit of worldly things. This might sound crazy, especially in our consumer-oriented society. In I Cor. 1:18, St. Paul reminds us: “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”.

In other words, what Christ Our Saviour is sharing with us today is indeed life-saving, because only by following His way, are we able to follow Christ, find healing from our passions, and become fellow victors with Christ over sin and death.

And that way is the cross. To share in the joy of His resurrection, of His victory over death, we must first participate in the struggle, the pain, and the sacrifice of crucifixion.

This does not mean that we should now all go home after the Divine Liturgy and sell our possessions and start sending money to a variety of charities that help the poor and needy. It also does not mean that we should put ourselves in a situation where we can seek martyrdom. Neither must we try and convince ourselves that all our problems are the result of someone being unfair to us because of our faith.

Instead, we need to die to our sinful desires and actions, and we must crucify the habits of thought, word, and deed that lead us to worship and serve ourselves instead of God and fellow man. We must end our obsession with hating our enemies, judging others, with getting our own way, living only for ourselves, and satisfying every self-gratifying desire.

And this is not easy, but it must be done if we want salvation. Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky wrote the following in his book 'The Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith', pp 90-91: "Suffering is repulsive to a natural person. Almost all his life consists in applying solicitude to solicitude in order to avoid suffering. But then the Apostle tells him that he rejoices in sorrows, that he glories in them. The Gospel blesses those who are banished, dishonoured, or beaten, calling everyone to follow a narrow path which few have travelled. It demands that one renounce oneself, that one despise one's life. The Gospel foretells woe to the wealthy, the satiated, those who laugh and are well spoken of by all men. In order to follow such teaching, we must defy our self-loving nature. What will rouse us up to this?"

What we need to do is take heed of the words of Saint Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

In other words, by dying to his sins, Paul became a living icon of the Lord. Our Saviour’s glorification of humanity was made present in Paul’s life. He became truly himself in the divine image and likeness by sharing in the Lord’s death and resurrection.

Amen