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## The Victory of the Cross

**HAIL, O LIFE BEARING CROSS!  
BRIGHT PARADISE OF THE CHURCH! THE TREE OF INCORRUPTION!  
YOU HAVE OBTAINED FOR US THE JOY OF EVERLASTING GLORY  
THROUGH YOU, THE HOSTS OF DEMONS ARE DRIVEN OUT,  
THE CHOIRS OF ANGELS ARE AMAZED AND REJOICE  
THE COMPANY OF FAITHFUL GATHER IN CELEBRATION  
O UNCONQUERABLE WEAPON, UNBROKEN STRONGHOLD,  
TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND PRIDE OF PRIESTS,  
BY FOLLOWING YOU MAY WE WITNESS THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF  
CHRIST OUR GOD**

As we reach the mid point of Great Lent Orthodox Christians pause to gather strength and to refocus on our goal, which is nothing less than the celebration of the Feast of Feasts--the Resurrection of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The source of our strength and the line of our focus is the Cross of the Lord.

And here is one of the great paradoxes which distinguishes Orthodoxy from amongst all other peoples--for us the cross is a source of JOY, a source of LIFE, a source of PRIDE, a cause for CELEBRATION!

This is not to say that we will not shed tears in a few weeks when we read the accounts of the Lord's suffering on Golgotha. We know of the humiliation, the spitting, the nails, the horror of those last hours, and we will grieve when we read the Twelve gospel readings on Holy Thursday and take part in the solemn Vespers of Great and Holy Friday. Yet, even then, the power and joy of the Resurrection will not be absent entirely. Even as He suffers, and especially as He falls asleep in death, we know that Hell will tremble with the realization that the One Who hangs on the Cross is the Lord of Heaven and Earth (and of Hell, too, much to its own dismay!).

This is why the Cross, for us Orthodox Christians, can never be seen solely in juridical terms (as a pay off for a debt owed) or as an example of the perfect and unblemished sacrifice. It is most definitely both those things, but it is also more. The Cross is, as the hymns for this Sunday proclaim, "an unconquerable weapon, an unbroken stronghold", a sign of triumph "through (which) hosts of demons are driven out".

The cross is our VICTORY. This is never made clearer than when the priest breaks the communion bread, now consecrated into the Body of Christ, into four parts and lays them on the paten on the holy altar proclaiming, "JESUS CHRIST CONQUERS". By means of the cross, Jesus Christ has conquered death and hell. By means of the cross, He has conquered the corrosive power of sin over the created order. By means of the cross He has liberated us from slavery to fear and desperation, because "through the cross joy has come into all the world".

Rome had created the cross as its most brutal means of execution, reserving it for the meanest criminals--murderers, traitors, the lowest slaves. Jesus was murdered according to Roman (not Jewish) law for sedition, for claiming to be a king when no one

had the right to make such a claim except for Caesar. The Sanhedrin (the Pharisees and Sadducees who were permitted by Rome to have charge over local Jewish affairs) wished to kill Jesus for their own well known religious and political reasons--based in malice, jealousy, fear, and misunderstanding. In the coming weeks we shall observe them all coming together to work what they will believe to be the final demise of a Galilean Rabbi. They shall attempt to complete their deed on that most brutal of contraptions and in so doing they shall pull heaven down to earth and complete the sundering of hell; they shall see the whole universe embraced in the outstretched arms of its Creator in the flesh and they shall watch their schemes unravel before their eyes as the Resurrection is proclaimed to an astonished population.

In mid Lent, just as the Fast threatens to become wearisome, we are reminded of the goal ahead, of the victory that awaits those who persevere. We remember that we entered the Fast with joy and that we are to continue with a spirit of joy because joy awaits us in the end, supreme joy which was purchased for us on that cross on Golgotha.

What a strange paradox! That such a brutal and ugly thing should be made into a symbol of beauty and victory!

What a fitting remedy! That the dead wood of the cross should bear such fruit, the recompense for that fruit which poisoned us in Eden!

What perfect justice! That mercy and forgiveness should triumph over the malice of the combined powers of the principalities and powers of earth and hell; that death should die and life should rise!

Hail O Cross, our Victory! Hail O Cross, our Glory! Hail O Cross, our unending Joy!