

Great and Holy Friday

In the icon of the Crucifixion of Christ, there is a skull located at the base of Christ's Cross. This skull lets us know that this is Golgotha, or the place of the skull, as mentioned in sacred scripture. This skull by tradition is the skull of Adam, who was buried at that spot. Underneath the place of Golgotha in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is a place called the chapel of Adam, where tradition tells us Adam's tomb was. There is a fissure in the rock in the back of Adam's chapel that leads up to the Chapel of the Crucifixion above it where tradition tells us the life-giving blood of Christ dripped down from the Cross onto the skull of Adam to restore him to life. This is portrayed on the icon with the blood of Christ dripping down onto the skull at the base of the Cross. By this dripping of Christ's blood, Christ gives life back to Adam. In the beginning, Adam partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and was banished from Paradise. Now all of that is reversed. Adam is now fed from the fruit of the tree of life, the Cross, and is led back to Paradise. As St. John tells us in his gospel, there was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified and was buried. Mary Magdalene when she was talking to the risen Jesus mistakes him for the gardener because by Jesus's death and resurrection, He has led humanity back to Paradise, symbolized by a garden at the place of crucifixion.

With the Roman practice of crucifixion, the Romans wanted it to not only be a means of corporal punishment, but also to be a sign to others. It was to give a message that all those who do this crime will meet this same end. While the Romans meant their practice of crucifixion to be a sign not to do something, Jesus also meant for His death on the Cross to be a sign, but Jesus's sign was a sign of what we are to do. That all those who wish to follow Jesus must take the same path of difficulty, suffering, and struggle that the Cross brought Him. At the heart of Christ's death on the Cross was His love for mankind and anyone who follows the love of Jesus will also have to sacrifice himself or herself on behalf of the beloved, just like He did. This is the sign that Jesus gives us on the Cross, to love even when it hurts. That is the love that God has for us, a love that does not end.

Even when we turned our backs on Christ as the human race and went far away from Him into sin, He never stopped loving us. In the movie, the Passion of the Christ, director Mel Gibson, wanted his hand to be filmed in the scene of the hand that nailed Christ to the Cross. He recognized his and all of our responsibilities in bringing about the death of Christ by our own sins. Yet, God did not reject us or abandon mankind after our sin, He loved us and as St. Paul says, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died us." This is the sign of God's love for us, the Cross. Every time we make the sign of the Cross, may we be reminded of this love.

There are only a few times during the year when we hear the very dramatic gospel reading of Christ's crucifixion. We hear it on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross commemorating the finding of the True Cross by St. Helen, as well as on the two weeks before the Great Fast of Lent begins, when we hear St. Mark's and St. Luke's accounts of the crucifixion preparing us for the difficult struggle of the upcoming Great Fast, and finally we hear the gospel reading of the crucifixion today, on the most solemn and somber day on the Orthodox Christian calendar. This is the day that all of creation wept. The day that God died on the Cross and His Body lay in the tomb for three days, while His soul descended into Hades. Today, we will enter into this same tomb with Christ to await the resurrection of the dead. Let us keep vigil this evening like the Myrrh-bearing women that we might be the first to see the dawn of the Resurrection morning.