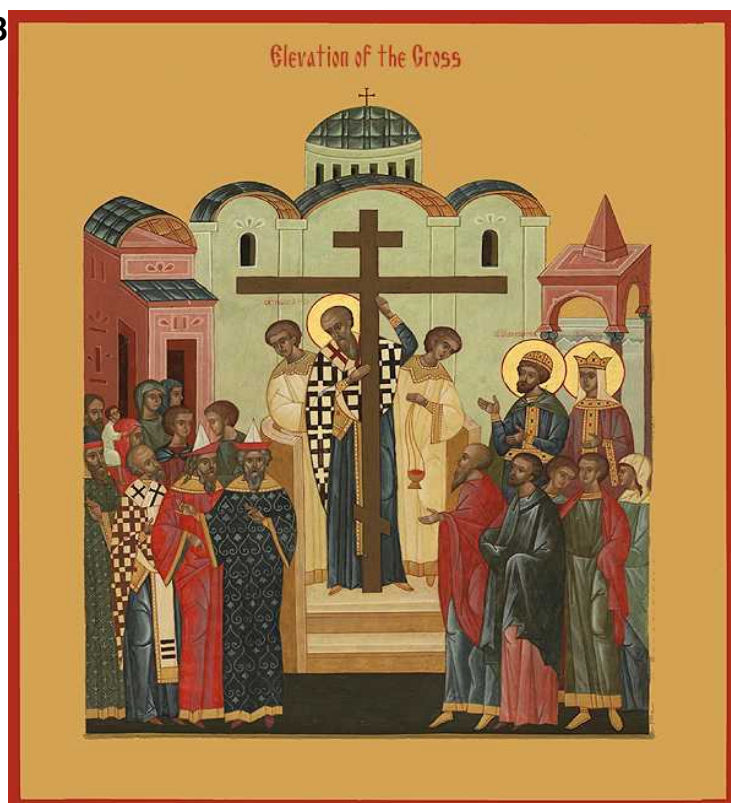


September 23, 2013



My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

For the world, the image of the cross is a very strange and confusing symbol. But for an Orthodox Christian, the cross is something precious. The world teaches us to love ourselves. We are told to make ourselves #1 in our life, to do first of all that which pleases us or what we think that we need. The message of the cross, however, is very different. It is a symbol of divine love and a rejection of worldly teachings. The cross gives us the power over sin and victory over death. It teaches us to emulate our Savior by living a life of self sacrifice, the type of life that opens to us the doors to eternal blessedness. Therefore, because the cross is something completely foreign to the values of this world, it is not surprising that the world could not tolerate the presence of Christ's cross and needed to both defame and hide it from view. It was dumped into a garbage heap over which was built a pagan Temple. In this way it remained lost for several centuries.

When persecution of early Christians by the pagan world was finally ended by the Roman emperor, St. Constantine, his holy mother, St. Elena, desired to find this most precious relic. Her son supported her both morally and materially and sent her to the Holy Land on this holy mission. Her search at first was fruitless. Then, through God's Providence, she was informed of a person who knew the secret place where the cross could be found. The pagan temple was identified and torn down, and the Christians began to dig under the watchful eye of the empress and the patriarch of the Holy City, Jerusalem.

The excavation led to the discovery of not one cross but three crosses. Now the problem was to determine which one of the three crosses was Christ's cross. The problem was solved by a miracle. A deceased person was being taken for burial near the place of excavation. His body was taken and placed on each cross. He was resurrected when his body was placed on Jesus's cross. Patriarch Makarii then blessed the multitude of Christians who had gathered to witness the search by raising the cross and blessing the people with it in all four directions. At each

raising, the people fell to their knees singing the hymn, "Lord have mercy". In this manner, the possession of the Cross of Christ was restored to the Christian Church. This Friday, September 27, the Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of the glorious finding and Exaltation of the Cross. This day is both a festive and a lenten day. It is festive because of the joy of having the cross as our defense against the forces of evil. It is a lenten day because the cross reminds us of the great sacrifice of our Savior who voluntarily died on the cross in order to save us. Thus, we honor His sacrifice by keeping the fast on that day. The vigil service on Thursday evening which begins at 6:00 PM is exceptional as we see during it a reenactment of the raising of the cross to the singing of "Lord have Mercy" which will be done in the middle of the church by our archbishop. The liturgies on Friday morning are at their normal times of 7:30 and 9:30 in the morning. I pray that all of you will be able and will want to celebrate this holy day with me in the church services.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar