



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

57 CARR ST, WEST PERTH WA 6005 PARISH PRIEST: FATHER EMMANUEL STAMATIOU

MOB: 0419 961 313 EMAIL: stamatem@iinet.net.au

Please look at our website to find this and other parish resources: www.evangelismos.com.au

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT - SUNDAY 3 APRIL 2016 – ADORATION OF THE CROSS

Today, the Third Sunday of Lent marks the middle of the Lenten period. Since the Cross of Salvation has been the symbol of victory of good over evil, life over death and eternal life over extinction, the Church saw fit to pause during this half-way mark in Lent to adore the Holy Cross of Christ and to receive courage and reassurance of God’s continued grace to enable us to continue with our efforts of self-denial, self-sacrifice and repentance. During today’s service, the Cross is carried from the altar aloft by the priest and flowers are distributed after the procession. This is symbolical of the beauty of the great Resurrection of Our Blessed Lord which we await to celebrate with great anticipation. We pay homage to the symbol of Our Salvation – the Cross.

THE EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s letter to the Hebrews [4:14-16, 5:1-6] Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need, for every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray,

since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honour to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him. “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

EXPLANATION: In the Old Testament, of the 12 tribes of Israel, the Levites were consecrated and chosen to serve God – they alone had the right to make sacrifices, burn incense, say prayers and sing in the temple. In the New Testament, Christ, as High Priest, sacrificed Himself to save the human race. By surrendering His Body to death and shedding His Blood for the people, and by offering His Body and Blood to the faithful in the sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ established His Church which became the new Israel, abolishing the Old Testament Church with its sacrifices and Levitical priesthood. At the same time He removed the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the people. Now all are led into the Holy of Holies in order to offer spiritual sacrifices. All who follow Christ, now become “the chosen people”, not only Jews. Christ is immortal and sinless and therefore His priesthood is able to transform humanity and reconcile man to God. Not Himself a member of the tribe of Levi, He became the true **“priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”** (Ps 10:4) From the sacred scriptures we know that apart from the **“chosen people”** (the Levites), there were other people also who had preserved faith in the One God. (Gen 14:18) The mysterious figure of Melchizedek represents an entirely different kind of priesthood. Melchizedek appears in Genesis (14:18-20), long before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. He is given no genealogy and nothing is said of his death. He offers up bread and wine to God. He receives tithes from Abraham, implying

he is superior to Abraham in rank – and by extension, superior to Abraham’s descendants, the Levites. He was the Old Testament prototype of Christ. Melchizedek was without earthly genealogy, so is Christ by virtue of the Virgin birth. He was both a priest and King of Salem. Theodortos (393-458AD) says that although there is no mention in the Old Testament about Melchizedek’s father, mother or ancestry or when the end of his life took place, nevertheless he was a real person and that the record of him in the Bible resembles the Son of God and confirms that Christ is a High Priest of a different order and kind than that of the ordinary traditional priesthood of the Jews (Hebrews 6:20, 7:1-28).

GOSPEL The Reading is from the Gospel of St Mark [8:34-38, 9:1] When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “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. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God present with power.”

EXPLANATION: Peter rebuked Jesus for wanting to be crucified and sacrificed for the sins of the world. Jesus explained to Peter and the people around Him that if they desire to follow Him they must crucify the flesh with its passions and follow his example of love, humility and self-denial. This requires one to, “**carry his cross**”, which is a

symbol of self-sacrifice and suffering. **(8:34)** “**Life**” is synonymous with “Soul”. The soul signifies the way in which life is manifested in man. The soul is not the cause of life. It is rather the bearer of life. It gives life to the body joined to it. It is an essence created, living and noetic, transmitting from itself to an organized and living body the power of life and of grasping objects of sense for as long as it is not separated from the body by death. Therefore to “**save**” one’s “**life**” means to base one’s earthly life on self which is the opposite to self-denial, which ultimately results in the loss of our soul. To “**lose**” one’s life is to accept suffering and sacrifice for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom, which ultimately brings salvation **(8:35)**. Nothing is more valuable to us than our souls. Even if you have gained all the riches of the world you cannot exchange them for the salvation of your eternal soul **(8:36-37)**. Intellectual faith in Jesus does not suffice, but confession of faith with one’s mouth is required as well. The soul is sanctified by faith, but the body is sanctified by confessing. Whoever therefore shall be ashamed to confess that Christ is God, of him also shall Christ be ashamed to confess him before His Father in Heaven **(8:38)**. And for those who have doubt that He is God, He says, “**there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God present with power.**” That is, Peter, James and John, who shall not die until they see the Transfiguration, the glory with which Jesus will appear at the Second Coming. That is, the manifestation of His divinity with which His human nature was united. Also on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came in “**power**” to establish the kingdom. The apostles experienced a power they never dreamed possible, a power that sent them to the far corners of the earth; a power to accept martyrdom without fear. We too can experience this power when we open the door of our heart through faith and prayer. **(9.1)**