

SERMON
Third Sunday of Lent (Mk 8:34-9:1)
15 March 2026

The Third Sunday of Holy Lent, the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, is placed by the Holy Fathers precisely in the middle of Great Lent, as if this is intersecting the period we are going through, just as the Cross, which today we exalt and venerate, and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross intersects the history of this world. And the importance of the Cross is, indeed, fundamental to the life of the faithful, which is why our Church puts the Holy Cross before us to remind us of its absolute importance and unique value, its central role in the possibility of the human race to gain salvation.

The lifting of one's cross, as today's Gospel Reading says, is the absolute prerequisite for someone to be considered a disciple and follower of the Lord. *"Whoever wants to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Mk 8:34). *"If you want to follow me,"* says the Lord, *"deny yourself and lift up your cross on your shoulders."* These are not two different things, but one is absolutely intertwined with the other: the lifting of the Cross means denial of the ego, of self-affirmation, and of the security that this world offers, not as a momentary decision and action, but as a way of life, as the Lord says in another context: *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up His Cross daily and follow me"* (Lk 9:23). In one's life, every day and every moment one must walk with an ethos based on self-crucifixion. And this obviously means that the lifting of the Cross is absolutely related to one's fellow person, the relationship I have with them every day, my response to their needs, and this is not simply limited to an emotional, spineless and, therefore, falsified participation in the reality of the Cross.

It is necessary to emphasise that the dimension of the cross in the life of a Christian does not mean that one likes to suffer, to be in pain, to have

difficulties; on the contrary, a Christian must always have joy (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:16), the joy that springs from the Resurrection of Christ, which, however, comes through the Cross, upon which our ego, our selfishness, our self-sufficiency are sacrificed to open up to the other person and share their trial, their pain, their cross.

The denial of the Cross in our lives means conforming to the world, with the mentality and ethos of the world. Certainly, Christ does not ask the human person to renounce the world in the sense of the world as creation- but He asks us to reject the world as a perspective which initiates distraction which leads to disorientation and the rejection of eternity. This would lead the person to becoming solely attached to the earthly and carnal, and seeing the present life as the only permanent thing. Such a loss of an eschatological perspective ends up as an obsessive and passionate attachment to biological needs and pleasures, and it neglects the spiritual dimension of human existence.

As a counterbalance to this dominance of the worldly mindset, our Holy Church puts forward the precious and life-giving Cross of Christ, not as a simple symbol or a reminder of the sacrifice of the Lord on the Cross that occurred in the historical past, but as a reality that must be constantly present in the life of the Christian, and one that gives meaning to their existence. The Cross for the Christian is not a historical memory, but through the Church has the potential to become an opening to the End Times, to the Kingdom of God that is coming and already present. Thus, the Cross for the faithful emerges as the pre-eminent criterion of life and existence, but also is the measure of true freedom in Christ, because whoever becomes crucified to the world is free from the things of the world.