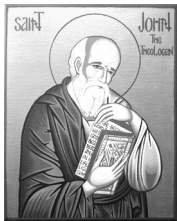


## The Passing of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian (Sept. 26)

**THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST** John the Theologian was the son of Zebedee and Salome, a daughter of St. Joseph the Betrothed. He was called by our Lord Jesus Christ to be one of His Apostles at the same time as his elder brother James. This took place at Lake Gennesaret (*i.e.* the Sea of Galilee). Leaving behind their father, both brothers followed the Lord.

The Apostle John was especially loved by the Saviour for his sacrificial love and his virginal purity. After his calling, the Apostle John did not part from the Lord, and he was one of the three apostles who was particularly close to Him. Saint John the Theologian was present when the Lord restored the daughter of Jairus to life, and he was a witness to the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor.



During the Last Supper, he reclined next to the Lord, and laid his head upon His breast. He also asked the name of the Saviour's betrayer. The Apostle John followed after the Lord when they led Him bound from the Garden of Gethsemane to the court of the iniquitous High Priests Annas and Caiphas. He was there in the courtyard of the High Priest during the interrogations of his Teacher and he resolutely followed after him on the way to Golgotha, grieving with all his heart. At the foot of the Cross he stood with the Mother of God and heard the words of the Crucified Lord addressed to Her from the Cross: "Woman, behold Thy son." Then the Lord said to him, "Behold thy Mother" (John 19:26-27). From that moment the Apostle John, like a loving son, concerned himself over the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and he served Her until Her Dormition.

St. John reposed when he was more than a hundred years old. He far outlived the other eyewitnesses of the Lord, and for a long time he remained the only remaining eyewitness of the earthly life of the Saviour. When it was time for the departure of the Apostle John, he went out beyond the city limits of Ephesus with the families of his disciples. He bade them prepare for him a cross-shaped grave, in which he lay, telling his disciples that they should cover him over with the soil. The disciples tearfully kissed their beloved teacher, but not wanting to be disobedient, they fulfilled his bidding. They covered the face of the saint with a cloth and filled in the grave. Learning of this, other disciples of St. John came to the place of his burial. When they opened the grave, they found it empty.

The Lord bestowed on His beloved disciple John and John's brother James the name "Sons of Thunder" an awesome messenger accompanied by the cleansing power of heavenly fire. And precisely by this the Saviour pointed out the flaming, fiery, sacrificial character of Christian love, the preacher of which was the Apostle John the Theologian. The eagle, symbol of the lofty heights of his theological thought, is the iconographic symbol of the Evangelist John the Theologian. The appellation "Theologian" is bestowed by Holy Church only to St. John among the immediate disciples and Apostles of Christ, as being the seer of the mysterious Judgements of God.

## Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

## For God So Loved the World...

**ON THE SUNDAY** before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Lord presents the central theme of the Gospel in a few words: God saves the world from the devil and sin driven by endless love alone!

To help in understanding, Jesus uses as an example a miracle which occurred while the Israelites were in the desert (Numbers 21:9). The people had been freed from slavery to the Egyptians by God's miraculous interventions. Yet, the Israelites often forgot the true God, who poured down upon them heavenly food every day, and worshipped the idols. God, to again bring them close to Him, allowed poisonous snakes to bite them, causing many to die. Moses turned to God with tears, and begged for the salvation of his people from this calamity. God replied: Make a snake statue out of copper, and put it on a high pole — so a cross would be formed — and those who were bitten by the snakes can look at it and be saved. So it happened. This is exactly what happened in the salvation of the whole world and the human race: Jesus accepted being nailed on the Cross, so that those who are poisoned by the devil (the ancient serpent) can turn to Him in faith and be saved.

For  
God  
so loved the world,  
that He gave His only begotten Son,  
that  
whoever  
believeth in  
Him should  
not perish,  
but have  
everlasting  
life.  
JOHN 3:16

Why does God the Father decide to sacrifice His only-begotten Son, and Christ accepts suffering this sacrifice? The Lord Himself gave us the original answer in the Gospel for the Sunday before the Exaltation: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3: 16)

But we must remember something important that the Lord points out. The Son of God died for the salvation of all, but not everyone is saved! As in the Sinai desert, those who faithfully looked upon the copper serpent on the wood were saved, so also those who with faith look towards Jesus Christ hanging on the Cross are saved. The Lord emphasized: "...whoever believes in the Son of God....has everlasting life."

What happiness there is, if we could feel deep within us this infinite love Christ has for us! If we constantly and faithfully turn our soul's gaze to Christ. If our life was such that we could say along with the Apostle Paul, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Source: [www.pemptousia.com](http://www.pemptousia.com)

## Something You Probably Didn't Know

**M**OST OF US are familiar with the **Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross** (September 14), and the **Third Sunday of Lent – Veneration of the Holy Cross of Our Lord**. But did you know that there is another occasion on our liturgical calendar (besides Wednesdays and Fridays during the year) where both Byzantine Rite Catholics and Orthodox honour the Holy Cross?



It's true. The **Procession of the Holy Relics of the Precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord** occurs on **August 1** (Gregorian), which is also the first day of the Dormition Fast. The propers of the Divine Liturgy (parts that vary according to the date and commemoration) of the feast are combined with those of the Holy Maccabean Martyrs, the commemoration of whose endurance is deemed appropriate for the first day of a fast. Unlike the September 14 observance, this commemoration is considered to be a minor feast, but it does have the bringing out of the cross and veneration by the faithful like the September feast. The Epistle and Gospel readings are also identical.

The history of this feast begins in Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) where it was the custom to carry the relic of the True Cross through the streets and squares of the city to ask for God's blessing and for relief from sickness. On the eve of the feast (July 31), observed as a forefeast, it was taken out of the imperial treasury, and laid upon the altar of the "Great Church" (Hagia Sophia) and the following day solemnly placed in the middle of the Great Church for the faithful to venerate. It was taken in procession daily throughout the city, offering it to the people to venerate, until the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God (Theotokos) (August 15), when it was returned to the imperial treasury.

In commemoration of this tradition, it is customary to have an outdoor procession with the *Lesser Blessing of Water* on August 1. It is the first of three "Feasts of the Saviour" in the month of August, the other two being the Transfiguration (August 6) and the Icon of Christ "Not Made by Hands" (August 16). Because of the blessing of holy water, this holy day is sometimes called "Saviour of the Water." There may also be celebrated on this day the *Rite of Blessing New Honey*, for which reason the day is also referred to as "Saviour of the Honey."

*Хресту Твоєму покланяємось, Владико,  
І святее воскресіння Твоє славим.*

*To Your Cross, O Master, we bow in veneration  
And we glorify Your holy resurrection.*

## Living the Catholic Faith: Worshipping in Church

**THE GIFT OF FAITH** that we have received must grow into knowing and living the contents of Catholicism. Though it is a gift from God, faith is, however, something that is activated and fostered within a community, the Church. The Spirit of God comes, and works, acts, inspires, motivates, principally those who are members of the Church, the new People of God. His principal work is, therefore, carried out in and through the Church.

Our relationship with God is twofold: personal and communal. Our personal faith relationship with Him consists in the following: our prayers addressed to Him, reading and meditating on the Bible, reading spiritual works, adhering to and living the message of the Gospels and the Commandments, doing good work, etc. An Eastern Christian's way of manifesting faith in God is *to believe, to teach, and to confess the faith*.

The communal side of our faith in God is manifested generally in worship, and the primary worship is the Divine Liturgy (Mass). It should be noted that no hard, fast distinction can be made between our personal and communal living of our faith. Both are linked and overflow one into the other. So, while there is the personal relationship with God in faith (our prayers, meditating on the Bible, living the Gospel message, etc.), there is also the corporate aspect of the faith-commitment to God, which is worshipping in and with the community.

The heart of our relationship with God is worshipping Him in church. This is what Ukrainian Catholics and other Eastern Christians of the Byzantine Rite have always understood and stressed. That is why sacred liturgy is at the centre of life for the Ukrainian Catholic and other Eastern Byzantine Rite Christians. One is not in the full sense a Christian and Catholic if one does not worship together with others at Divine Liturgy, for in it, one's own contact and relationship with God is most profound, made so by virtue of receiving God's graces.



The Divine Liturgy in Eastern Christendom more than anything else, having at its centre the Eucharistic Lord, is what constitutes and sustains the Church and her life. In the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Church lives her faith and knows herself and her mission. The mystery of the Lord's redemptive work unfolds here. His Death and Resurrection in a mysterious way are re-enacted, because in the consecration of the bread and wine into His Body and Blood, His Sacrifice of the Cross and His Resurrection from the dead are made actual. Thus, because of the central and irreplaceable position of the Divine Liturgy, Eastern Christians of the Byzantine Rite have greatly embellished and adorned this central liturgical worship of the Church.

Thus, an essential response in faith is worshipping God. And the prime worship is the Divine Liturgy. This is where our faith is sustained and fostered. This is where we are ultimately united with Christ and all members of the Church. This is where an abundance of God's graces is bestowed on us.