

## Is Christ the last Christian?

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**Gospel:** Mark 8:34-38 AV: *And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

An atheist philosopher, making fun of Christianity initiated this expression. The continual challenge of the Christians is to prove that there are like their Christ. Otherwise, Christianity would have died on the Cross with Christ.

There are many feasts related to the Holy Cross. The two most important feasts are the Elevation of the Cross (September 14) and today's Veneration of the Cross in the middle of Holy and Great Lent.

One notices the difference in the Gospel passages selected for these two feasts. For the feast of the Elevation of the Cross, we read the letter of Saint Paul, where he says that the Cross is our pride, but it is a stumbling block to the others and ignorance to the

Gentiles. The Gospel passage of the feast speaks to us about the event of Christ's crucifixion between the two thieves. This is all pointing to the real meaning of the feast, which is the finding of the Cross of Christ by Saint Helene, and considering the Cross as a sign of Victory for Christians.

As for the readings of today's feast of the Veneration of the Cross, the text from the Epistle to the Hebrews talks about Christ as the Archpriest and about His sacrifice. The Gospel passage talks about the Cross not as an event in history but as a phenomenon. It tells us about how the disciples of Christ ought to be, that is the giving of themselves to others, or their self-sacrifice.

The Cross of Christ, the Archpriest, was also His altar. The Cross was the altar on which Christ became the one who offers and the one who is offered, the slaughterer and the slaughtered sacrifice, the priest and the sacrifice.

This is the true meaning of the Cross. It is an altar. This is why we bow down before it, we hang it on our chest, we make the sign of the Cross, and we elevate it in our homes.

Every place should be transformed into an altar on which the Christian offers himself as a sacrifice, so that the saying of this philosopher, "Christ is the last Christian," won't be true.

Christians are known from the message of the Cross, that is from the continuous offering of themselves on this altar of the two pieces of wood, the horizontal piece and the vertical piece.

Christians are proud, and they do good in being proud, using the Holy Cross every time and everywhere. The Cross is painted on walls, hand on chest, and the sign of the Cross is made to bless every work or action.

In doing this sign, we make from the Cross an altar, offering on it all our work as a sacrificial work of love. When we make the sign of the Cross on our chest, the cross will in fact carry. We ought to see the scene of the Christian having the Cross hung on his chest as the scene of Christ hung on the Cross. Every place signed with the Cross, or the place that elevates the Cross, is as the stones used by Abraham to build the place where he gave his son Isaac as a sacrifice. The Cross is the altar of the Lord.

Let's make the sign of the Cross before we eat our meals so that we realize that our need from eating is to satisfy our necessity. Eating more than our necessity would be eating from meals of others. Gluttony is rejected.

Let's make the sign of the Cross before we deal with any amount of money, or when we think of our money and realize that it is not ours, and our right to using it is just for our necessity and the rest is the right of others to it. Let's make the sign of the Cross on every scene and realize that our right from every scene is just chastity. Let's remember the Cross before we utter any word, and this will lead to a chaste mouth. Let's crucify all our passions, and offer all our belongings as a burning sacrifice on the altar of the Cross, and He will purify them from all selfishness. Let's stretch every moment and detail of our life on that eternal altar. This is the

uniqueness of Jesus' disciples. They follow Him, that is they go after His steps.

The Cross is an altar that radically changes our life, from a life of thieves to a life of priests. Selfishness is theft, and love is priesthood. Carrying the Cross is nothing but fasting.

Practically, Lent is a continuous surgical operation to heal our selfishness. Lent turns us into priests of the divine love, living not for ourselves, but for others as our Master did. Lent goes hand in hand with the Cross, as love with the altar. The Cross is the altar of self-sacrifice. That's why it is venerated in the middle of Lent, because the purpose of Blessed Lent is love and the healing of the selfishness which is nested in us.

Christ, the sacrificial love, lifted up Himself on the altar of the Cross, but he also lifts us up through the Church. Because we love Him after he pulled us towards Him through His love, he lifts us up on our Cross that we may become offerings and sacrifices of love and humanity to every man.

This is the new altar. Our new Cross is to deny ourselves, carrying this Cross as our altar, wherever we go, following the steps of our Master. In this way, we become His disciples, dying with Him, on the likeness of His death, and rising with Him, on the likeness of His resurrection.

To Thy Cross O Master we bow down in worship,  
and Thy Holy Resurrection we praise glorify.

Amen.