

The Sign of the Cross

"O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance,
granting to Thy people safety over all their enemies, and
by the power of Thy Cross preserve Thine own estate."

[Troparion of the Holy Cross]

We heard in last night's Vesper Readings and in the hymns of today's Orthros Old Testament events that symbolized the Holy Cross. The first symbol was the story of Jonah when he extended his hands in the form of a cross in the belly of the whale, signifying the saving events of Christ's passions. And when he came out of the whale on the third day, he symbolized the resurrection on the third day. And the hymns explained that Moses having struck horizontally with his rod, dividing the Red Sea and causing Israel to cross on foot, then having struck it transversely, brought it together over Pharaoh and his chariots. Also the rod by which he struck the bitter water transformed it into drinking water for the thirsty people.

But the most clear and beautiful symbol is when Moses put the serpent of brass upon a pole (Numbers 21:29) and it came to pass that if serpents had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. This serpent symbolizes the crucified Christ that took upon himself our flesh, but was sinless, as was the brass

serpent with no poison. And He became the cause of life and the healing for all who believe in Him. The events and stories that point to the Cross are numerous in the Old Testament. Joshua, the son of Nun, lifted up his hands in the form of a cross and all the inhabitants of the city were utterly destroyed before the sunset (Joshua 8:26). Likewise when Jesus spread out His hands on the Cross, the Sun hid its rays because it saw that sin was destroyed and hell was invaded and everything was fulfilled.

So making the sign of the Cross in the Old Testament preceded all salvific events during which God intervened in an essential way in the life of people. The best sign was what happened after the crucifixion of Christ.

After we saw the grace in the events where the making of sign of the Cross happened in the Old Testament, and the grace of the Cross of Jesus, we ask, when do we make the sign of the Cross, and why?

We make the sign of the Cross as a thanksgiving upon saying, "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." We make the sign of the Cross when we eat and when we wake up, and before we sleep, when we go out from the house and when we return to it, before and after studying. The sign of the Cross can accompany us during the day in all our actions, blessing, sanctifying and purifying our actions. We often make the sign of the Cross during the liturgical services. During a wedding,

we make the sign of the Cross with the crowns. The blessing at the end of every liturgy is given by the sign of the Cross, and all liturgical elements such as water and wine are blessed by making the sign of the Cross over them.... Summing up, the sign of the Cross is the calling of the divine grace upon people and things.

What we conclude from all the events of the Old testament and our daily and liturgical life that involve making the sign of the Cross is that, first, this sign is the lightening that precedes the thunder of the divine grace and the presence of its might.

Second, the making of the sign of the Cross comes between two situations. The first is the Old situation, as we saw in the examples above, a situation of fear, need, thirst, and sin, etc. , the situation of the Old man. But the situation that follows the making of the sign is the situation of the new man, quenched instead of thirsty, strong instead of weak. It is the situation in which grace completes our weaknesses.

The sign of the Cross brings down upon us divine grace, if we use it to reverse an old situation making it new. The sign of the cross is a blow against our old man and breath to the new man and his resurrection as a new man in Christ. The sign of the Cross brings about a true change in us, realized by the divine grace which we invoke when we make this victorious sign.

"To thy Cross O Lord we bow down and thy holy
resurrection we praise and glorify."

Amen