

St. George Newsletter

April 2013

The Kursk Root Icon

On 8 September, 1295, on the day of the Nativity of the Most-Holy Mother of God, a small force of hunters from Rylsk came to hunt at the Tuskora river, 27 versts from Kursk. One of the hunters, an honorable and pious man, seeking prey in the woods, found a small icon lying face down on the root of a tree. He had barely lifted it to inspect it when the spot upon which the icon lay burst out with a strong spring of pure water. The icon turned out to be of the type referred to as the "Sign" of the Mother of God. The hunter who found the icon knew that this was no ordinary occurrence. He called his companions and together they built a small wooden chapel, into which they placed this icon. The residents of Rylsk, hearing of the newly-appeared icon of the Mother of God, began to visit it for veneration, and many miracles began to appear from it.

In 1385 the Kursk region was again swept by the Tatars. They tried to burn down the chapel and its Icon, but the wooden structure would not burn. The priest who lived by the chapel, Fr. Bogolep, explained to them that the reason for this miracle was the Icon itself. The incensed Tatars hacked the Icon in half and tossed the pieces in different directions, then burned the chapel.

They took the priest prisoner and was forced to tend to Tatar flocks. Some time later he was ransomed by emissaries of the Muscovite Grand Duke who were on their way to the Golden Horde, and he returned to the place where the chapel had stood. After a long search, while praying and fasting, he found both halves of the holy Icon, placed them side by side, and they grew together seamlessly, exhibiting only something "like dew".

In 1676 the holy Icon traveled to the Don River for blessing the Don Cossack troops. In 1684 Tsars Ivan and Petr Alekseevich sent a copy of this Icon with the order that it accompany Orthodox troops into battle. In 1687 the holy Icon was sent to the "Great Army." In 1689 copies of the holy Icon were given to the armies in the Crimean campaign. In 1812 a copy of the holy Icon was sent to Prince Kutuzov and the battling troops. Before his icon St. Seraphim of Sarov prayed and was healed.

On the night of 7-8 March, 1898, conspirator revolutionaries-atheists tried to blow up the Miracle-working Icon with a hellish bomb, but the Lord Jesus Christ glorified His Most-Pure Mother yet more, for despite the terrifying destruction in the cathedral surrounding the Icon, it remained untouched.

On 12 April 1918, the holy Icon was stolen from the cathedral of the Monastery of the Sign of the Mother of God and stripped of its ornamentation, but on 2 May it was found and returned to its place.

Finally, in 1919, while accompanying Bishop Feofan of Kursk and Oboyan' and some monks of the Monastery of the Sign, the holy Icon crossed the border to the neighborly Serbia. In 1920 it again, at the behest of General Wrangel, visited Russia at the Crimea and remained there until the final evacuation of the Russian Army in the first days of November, 1920. The holy Icon returned to Serbia, where it remained until 1944, when, together with the Synod of Bishops, it went abroad, to Munich (Bavaria) with Metropolitan Anastassy. In 1951 Metropolitan Anastassy moved from Munich to America. Since 1957 the Icon had resided in the main cathedral dedicated to it in the Synod of Bishops in New York. The holy Icon regularly travels to all the dioceses of the Russian diaspora.

Rules for receiving the Kursk icon in one's home

1. A table should be prepared in the home to be visited where the icon may be set during the moleben. It is recommended that the table be covered with a clean white cover, and that a pillow in a clean white pillowcase is set on it (for resting the icon).
2. A candle or lampada is lit either before the icon or in the icon corner.
3. A list of names (of the living only) is prepared and placed on the table for commemoration at the moleben.
4. If the visit with the icon takes place in the evening when it is dark, the lights should be turned on in all of the rooms, since the miraculous icon will be carried around the whole house or apartment.

The Most Just Scales

Archbishop ANTHONY (Medvedev)

“Come, God-lovers all, behold the honorable Cross”

In the artistically figurative language of our marvelous Orthodox divine service, the Cross of the Lord is compared with "just scales." In the Church Slavonic language, this is expressed by the words "merilo pravednoe" ("just balance").

"In the midst of two thieves, Thy Cross was found to be a just balance."

Here before our spiritual gaze is Golgotha on the day of our redemption from sin, the curse and death.

Our Lord the Redeemer is on the Cross. As a man, He is crucified; but as God, He weighs everything, He tests everything.

And He is between two thieves, who are crucified on their crosses.

One of the thieves, as a real forerunner of the Bolsheviks, maliciously blasphemes. But the other thief, who stopped the first, and himself repented... O, how his image has become

imprinted on the soul of the Christian, in the consciousness of the whole Church! With what compunction we listen on Great Thursday evening when this "repentance of the thief" is read about in the Eighth Passion Gospel, and after that when they sing about the wise thief. For centuries and centuries they have been singing about him. The hearts of those singing are humbled, and in response, the hearts of the listeners are also humbled. But someone is malevolent and will not want to humble himself; some unfortunate one will not want – stubbornly will not want – to depart from his malice. And amidst all stands the crucifixion, as a depiction of that Cross of the Lord on Golgotha, of that most just balance with which the Son of God, invisible to us, weighed and weighs everything.

But how does the balance of the Cross act according to the explanation of the Church's hymn?!

"In the midst of two thieves, Thy Cross was found to be a just balance: the one was brought down to hades by the weight of his blasphemy, while the other was lightened of his transgressions unto the knowledge of theology; O Christ God, glory be to Thee!"

And so, one (the blasphemer of God) is brought down to hades by the weight of his blasphemy, while from the other the weight of his transgressions was cast off, so that he came to know the One about whom he theologized; that is, so that he came to know more and more the One whom he called Lord.

Thus, malice and blasphemy forced one cup of the scales to go down, while the faith, repentance, humility and self-condemnation of the wise thief drove the other cup of the scales upwards.

That is why on our eight-pointed depictions of the Cross of the Lord the "footrest" or the lower crossbeam of the Cross is depicted symbolically aslant, as the crossbeam of scales on which one cup of the scales drops down, while the other is raised up.

The left side of the Cross from our view is the

right side from the view of the Lord, Who was crucified on the Cross. According to tradition, the repentant thief was crucified on the right side, his calling into the Kingdom of Heaven being signified by the raised end of the footrest of the Cross, while the other end signified the fall and condemnation of the unrepentant thief.

This action of the Cross, as a most just balance, we may call divine all-justness, and the fact that Christ the Savior, as the true Incarnation of Love, on the Cross stretched out his pierced hands to all people, praying for His crucifiers – this is His most divine all-goodness.

He weighs and tests; He also calls.

The mystery of the joining of His all-justness and all-goodness is the mystery of our salvation and the mystery of the future life.

All-goodness touches us, it raises us up and encourages us while all-justness forces us to responsibly weigh every action, word, thought...

"A good defence before the dread judgement seat of Christ, let us ask!"

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