

The Life-giving Cross which afforded us salvation, through this token, we glorify Thee in one accord. With the light from the Father of Light, shining upon the earth, and in a staff of power to the faithful. Through this token we glorify Thee, in one accord. By its luminous rising, it was marvelously exhibited to us as a sign of victory against the enemy. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

THE HOLY CROSS OF VARAK

*Before Thy Cross, O Christ, we prostrate ourselves;
Glory to Thee and to Thy Holy Cross. Alleluia.*

These are the words of a chant that comes to us from the very ancient times; throughout the centuries we venerated the Cross, singing the glory of the Cross of Christ in our Churches.

*Unto him who came to enlighten His chosen Holy Church
And crowned her with the Holy Cross, let us sing Glory.*

Today, the Armenian Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Cross of Varak. This is yet another feast dedicated to the Holy Cross. It is worthwhile to explore the historical background of the feast and to draw out its significance for our spiritual edification. It's a fascinating story indeed.

The Cross of Varak takes its name after a mountain named Varak in Van, in the province of Vasbouragan, in the heartland of historic Armenia, today in Eastern Turkey (Asia Minor).

The Cross of Varak is a relic of our Lord's wooden Cross, upon which He was crucified and which was discovered on Mt. Varak in the 7th century, where the relic was concealed, earlier, in the 4th century, by St. Hripsime, the young virgin or nun. She hid this holy relic of the Cross in a crevice of a rock on Mt. Varak to keep it safe from her persecutors while she was fleeing with her companions from the advances of the Emperor of the Roman Empire, Diocletian.

Hripsime and her companions, numbering over 40, whose mother superior was St. Gayaneh, fled to Armenia, escaping from the heathen Emperor, who

created their own feast day of the Holy Cross, the Holy Cross of Varak, which is distinctively an Armenian feast day of the Holy Cross, and solely belongs to the Armenian Church.

We are compelled to ask the question...why so?

Because the Armenian people, during the course of their long history of oppression and persecution by barbaric hordes and savage tribes invading our land, needed a spiritual anchor upon which they could lean, to be comforted and strengthened; Armenians needed to be reminded of the eventual triumph of the Cross; that temporarily apparent defeats should not have discouraged them; all eventually ends up with triumph through the power of the Cross of Christ.

By believing in the Cross, we discover that with God's help we will be able to bear our crosses, and with our abiding faith, we will be ultimately victorious with our Lord Jesus Christ, who turned the apparent defeat into victory and conquered death by crushing its power and making the instrument of death [the cross] a most powerful instrument for victory. The cross before Christ meant death, but the Cross after Christ meant life.

The reality of the Cross in our lives cannot be ignored or underestimated. We cannot eliminate it from our life; either we accept it, and thus making it a necessary and important part of our spiritual growth, or we simply deny it as something illusionary. But let it be known that by denying it we will also deny for ourselves the power of God.

I want you to see that the things which matter most in life get their supreme value through the Cross of Christ. By shedding His precious blood upon the Cross, Christ sanctified it, making it worthy for adoration.

I want you to recognize that man's supreme worth is vindicated by the Cross of Christ. God saw something precious in each human being to let His Only-Begotten Son to be crucified upon a Cross. The message of the Cross is the very heart of Christianity and it is eternal. It is both Sacrifice and Victory. This is the glory of the Cross. Through the all-conquering Cross we were made the inheritors of the Kingdom of God. We shall always sing the glory of the Cross of Christ. Amen.