



FEAST OF THE CROSS, 17 TOUT

Crucifying Myself

Mission 16:15, St. Stephen Coptic Orthodox Church

Every year the Church lifts up the Cross and keeps its feast with joy. The feast leaves one question worth asking: **how does the Cross I honor become the life I actually live?** The answer moves from honest self-examination, through the feast and Christ's saving work, to what Jesus means when He tells His disciples to deny themselves and take up their crosses, and it ends in hope and prayer.

Four kinds of authority appear. **Ecumenical doctrine** (Christ's saving death and Resurrection, baptism into His death) defines the Church's confession. **Received liturgical and patristic tradition** (the Synaxarium, the feast's procession and hymns, the Fathers) shows how the Church has prayed and lived that faith. The **pastoral teaching of Pope Shenouda III** applies that faith to the spiritual life and is received with honor, not as conciliar definition. **Pastoral discipline** (fasting, confession, Eucharistic preparation) guides how each person practices it under the care of the Church. Catechumens follow their priest and catechumenate; sacramental disciplines apply to baptized Orthodox participants.

The mirror: what am I defending?

When someone corrects me, do I first try to understand, or defend myself?

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

JAMES 1:22-25 NKJV

James does not accuse his readers of ignoring God's word. He warns those who hear it gladly and stop there. The man in the mirror truly sees; his failure is that he walks away unchanged. The mirror is God's word, not my own mood: examining myself in its light is different from being preoccupied with myself. James calls that word a law of liberty, because looking honestly does not enslave me, it frees me.

Seeing something in myself is not the same as responding to it.

The moment someone corrects us is the moment we either look or look away. This is why the lesson begins with a correction rather than a list of sins: the need for repentance appears before any sin is named.

Why the Church celebrates the Cross



Why does the Church celebrate an instrument of execution?

The Coptic Synaxarium heads 17 Tout as the Feast of the Consecration of the Church of the Honorable Cross. This is the Church's own account of the feast:

"On this day the church celebrates the appearance of the Honorable Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was revealed by the lover of God, Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, from under the pile of Golgotha"

"She built a church for it, consecrated it and celebrated for the Honorable Cross on the seventeenth day of the month of Tute."

"Because the feast of the appearance of the Honorable Cross, which is on the tenth of Baramhat, always comes during fasting, it was substituted by the fathers for the Seventeenth of Tute which is the day of consecration of its church."

So the Church keeps two feasts of the Cross. The first, 17 Tout, is the consecration of the church St. Helena built over Golgotha where she found the Cross, consecrated in 335 and known today as the Church of the Resurrection; parish teaching commonly adds that this feast also remembers the Cross that appeared to Emperor Constantine before his victory in 312. It falls right after Nairouz, the Coptic New Year, and because it lies outside the fast it is the larger celebration, kept for three days, 17–19 Tout. The second, 10 Baramhat, is the feast of the finding of the Cross in 326, to which parish teaching also attaches its return from Persian captivity in 629 under Emperor Heraclius; it always falls in Great Lent (in 2026 it fell on Thursday, March 19) and is kept for one day. This year 17 Tout 1743 falls on Sunday, September 27, 2026, and the feast readings replace the ordinary Sunday readings. The 17 Tout entry itself gives no year and does not name the Church of the Resurrection, Constantine's vision, or Heraclius; the 10 Baramhat entry dates the finding to 326, and the other years come from parish summaries, which do not all agree on which event belongs to which feast. The Synaxarium is quoted here; the rest is received teaching.

We venerate the Cross because of Christ's saving work. We celebrate His victory, not suffering for its own sake. A Coptic diocesan article on the feasts puts it this way:

"we remember that the Lord trampled death by the Cross, and He granted life to everybody, and forced and defeated Satan."

"We celebrate two feasts for the Cross, and we carry the Cross during the processions and the celebrations."

On the feast the church processes around the altar and the nave with the Cross, chanting in the Palm Sunday (Hosanna) tune, because the joy of the Cross is the joy of Christ's victory. The same Cross is signed over the faithful in every prayer. The early Church already did this. St. Cyril of Jerusalem taught the catechumens of his day, "Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and on everything". St. John Chrysostom told his people, "When therefore you sign yourself, think of the purpose of the cross, and quench anger, and all the other passions." The Fathers show that the sign of the Cross is a confession of Christ's victory and a protection whose grace is from God; it is never a charm that works apart from faith.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18 NKJV

This verse belongs to the feast's own Pauline reading. To the world the Cross looks like defeat; to those being saved it is God's power. For catechumens, this is the context of the celebration. For longtime Copts, it is an invitation to reconsider a familiar practice.

Why three days?

The Church keeps this feast for three days, 17 to 19 Tout. The Synaxarium records the feast but does not say why it lasts three days. The Katameros, the Church's book of readings, suggests an answer when each day is read whole: the readings of Vespers, Matins, and the Liturgy together, not the Liturgy readings alone. Read that way, the three days move in three steps.

17 Tout: Behold the Cross. Christ is lifted up, and the Cross is revealed as God's power. The Vespers Gospel says, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He" (John 8:28), and the Pauline Epistle is the verse above: "to us who are being saved it is the power of God." At Matins:

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

JOHN 12:32 NKJV

18 Tout: Life through the Cross. The Vespers of the second day, prayed on the evening of the first, calls the Church to worship: "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool" (Psalm 99:5). Beginning with Matins, the readings turn to what the lifted-up Christ gives: eternal life, a new creation, Himself as our food, and the resurrection.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

JOHN 3:14-15 NKJV

The Pauline Epistle says that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:15), and the Liturgy Gospel is Christ's own promise: "I am the bread of life," and "I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:35, 40).

19 Tout: Carry the Cross. From the Vespers of the evening before, the Gospels turn to us. Vespers reads Matthew 16:24 and Matins reads the same words in Mark 8:34: "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." The Liturgy Gospel adds:

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

LUKE 14:27 NKJV

Each day touches all three; what moves is the emphasis. And the order is the order of this lesson. First we behold what Christ has done, then we receive His life, and only then are we asked to carry the Cross. The third day's Gospel is the same call Peter hears in Matthew 16, later in this lesson.

Keeping the feast three days is the Church's practice, and no official text states why. The pattern above is drawn from the readings themselves. Fr. Antonios Fekry's commentary on the daily Katameros gives the same shape: because the Cross is the way of our life, the Church gives it three days. On the first, Christ came to be crucified; on the second, the Eucharist extends the sacrifice of the Cross; on the third, we live the life of the Cross by following Christ. Read this as what the readings show, not as an official explanation.

His Cross comes first

Two ideas, in order.

What Christ accomplishes. St. Athanasius of Alexandria explains that the Word of God took a body from us and offered it to death for all, so that death itself would be undone and we would be turned back to incorruption. In his own words:

"He gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father"

"He next offered up His sacrifice also on behalf of all, yielding His Temple to death in the stead of all, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old trespass, and further to show Himself more powerful even than death, displaying His own body incorruptible, as first-fruits of the resurrection of all."

"the death, which they thought to inflict as a disgrace, was actually a monument of victory against death itself."

How we respond. We follow Him through repentance, obedience, sacrifice, and love. The diocesan article says, "He made the bearing of the Cross a condition for the discipleship to Him." Our cross is participation in His life, not another act of redemption. Nothing we do adds to His offering.

Christ saves me. I do not save myself by suffering. This is the order of the whole lesson. Whatever is asked of us in the pages that follow is a reply to what He has already given, never a way of earning God's love through pain, religious performance, or willpower.

Peter: believing, yet resisting

Matthew 16:13–25 moves in three stages.

Recognition.

"Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

MATTHEW 16:16 NKJV

Peter's confession is true, and Jesus says it is a gift from the Father. Whatever comes next, Peter is not an unbeliever.

Resistance.

"Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!'"

MATTHEW 16:22 NKJV

The same Peter who confessed Christ now tries to steer Him away from the Cross. His motive looks like love, but Jesus calls it the mind of men, not of God. The rebuke is sharp because the stakes are high, yet Jesus does not send Peter away. "Behind Me" is where a disciple walks, and two verses later Jesus says to the same disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me." Peter is still in the company.

Invitation.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.'"

MATTHEW 16:24-25 NKJV

The call to self-denial is spoken to disciples who already believe, right after one of them resisted the Cross. Losing my life for His sake ends in finding it; the sentence is about gain, not destruction.

Peter is a point of identification, not someone to criticize from a distance. He believed rightly and still resisted where Jesus led. So the question moves: not "What do I believe about Christ?" but "Will I follow Him when His way conflicts with mine?" Can I recognize who Jesus is and still resist where He wants to lead me?

What must die, and what must not

The central distinction of the lesson must be made explicit before anyone examines themselves.

- ✚ **What must be surrendered:** pride, revenge, self-justification, and my insistence on my own will when it opposes God's.
- ✚ **What is not to be destroyed:** my personhood, my body, my God-given gifts, and my capacity to love and choose.

In this lesson the word *passions* means the sinful desires and habits that seek to govern us, not every emotion or natural desire.

In summary, not as a direct quotation: Pope Shenouda III teaches in *The Word "I"* that the root problem of the self is its independence from God, and that self-denial means turning away from that self-centered independence and yielding our will to God. In his own words:

"The first problem that man faced was the independence of his self from God, such that he manages himself by himself, without leaving God to manage it."

"Therefore, the principle of life in Christ is self-denial..."

"'Not I' means 'not my will,' but Your will..."

The body is not the enemy. On Galatians 5:24 he writes, "We do not kill the flesh because killing the flesh is a sin", and "But we try to kill the sinful lust of the flesh."

Self-denial is not self-hatred, and it is not accepting mistreatment. On meekness he writes, "The right concept of meekness recognizes being connected with manliness, self-respect, courage and gallantry." **In summary**, he offers Christ cleansing the Temple and Moses breaking the

tablets as examples of meekness joined to courage. A meek person can accept correction, serve unseen, and refuse revenge while still speaking the truth and protecting others.

Three concrete examples:

- ✚ **Pride:** accept correction.
- ✚ **Vainglory:** serve without demanding recognition.
- ✚ **Resentment:** refuse revenge.

Yield the will. Keep the person.

With Christ, not alone

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and 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 NKJV

Three phrases carry the verse.

"I have been crucified with Christ." Paul does not say he crucified himself. He says he has been crucified with Christ: the death that matters happened at Golgotha, and he has been joined to it. Crucifying myself is never a solo project; it is living out a union that Christ made. Pope Shenouda III draws the same line in his Holy Week guidance: "Therefore, in order for Christ to live in us, we have to carry our cross and follow Him."

"Christ lives in me." The center of the sentence is not a death but a life. Paul still speaks of "the life which I now live in the flesh": he has not disappeared; he lives now by faith in the Son of God. The self is not erased; it is inhabited and renewed.

"Who loved me and gave Himself for me." The order matters. He loved me first and gave Himself first. Everything I surrender is a reply to that gift, not a payment toward it. St. John Chrysostom, on the boast of the Cross: "That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me the slave, the enemy, the unfeeling one; yea He so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me."

My surrender is a response to His love, not an attempt to earn it. And the distinction that keeps this honest: God's grace does not make my response unnecessary. My effort does not make His grace unnecessary. Pope Shenouda III describes the whole spiritual life as fellowship with the Holy Spirit:

"The Orthodox doctrine holds that the whole spiritual life of man is a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supports but man should strive."

"Grace does not do all the work, otherwise God would not have said: Return to Me ... and I will return to you (Zech.1: 3)."

The Church avoids two errors: "I must change myself alone," and "I do not need to make any real effort." Both belong to one life lived with Christ, not alone.

Buried with Him, raised with Him

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

ROMANS 6:3-6 NKJV

The movement is baptism, union with Christ's death, walking in new life. Self-denial is sacramental before it is motivational. In baptism the Church does not hand us a resolution; she buries us with Christ. Pope Shenouda III: "In baptism we die in order to live. We are buried in baptism. The old man dies. The "I" dies, so that we may put on Christ..." And elsewhere: "Man's corrupted nature (the old man) must die in baptism so he may receive the new nature."

The old man is our fallen self as it lived under sin's dominion: the whole corrupted nature Paul calls "the body of sin," not our physical body and not a separate personality hiding inside us.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."

ROMANS 6:12 NKJV

"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

ROMANS 6:14 NKJV

Receiving new life does not mean temptation disappears. It means sin is no longer the master we must obey. Paul still tells the baptized not to let sin reign, which means temptation has not vanished. What has changed is the master: sin can still knock, but it no longer has the right to command.

For baptized Orthodox participants, this recalls the life they have received. For catechumens, it explains the life they are preparing to enter. The lesson does not assume that everyone who reads it has been baptized or receives Communion.

The Church teaches us to live this

Five familiar practices, each connected to life in Christ rather than offered as a technique.

- ✙ **Prayer:** bringing my thoughts, desires, and decisions before God. This is where the mirror becomes a conversation, and where "not my will, but Yours" stops being a slogan. The Church gives a rhythm for it in the Agpeya, the prayers of the hours; the Sixth Hour remembers the Crucifixion every day at noon.
- ✙ **Fasting:** practicing self-control rather than allowing appetite to govern me. Fasting disciplines the body; it never despises it. "We do not kill the flesh because killing the flesh is a sin", Pope Shenouda III writes, "But we try to kill the sinful lust of the flesh."
- ✙ **Repentance and confession:** turning back to God and bringing sin into the open rather than defending it. It is the opposite of the man who walks away from the mirror. "The Holy Spirit supports but man should strive."
- ✙ **The Eucharist:** communion in Christ's Body and Blood, not merely a reminder to behave better. It is union with the crucified and risen Lord, the same union Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6 describe. As St.

John Chrysostom says, the Cross is present in every sacrament of the Church: in baptism, in the Eucharist, in ordination.

✝ **Service and giving:** learning to love when it costs time, comfort, attention, or possessions. Pope Shenouda III describes those who succeed in service as those who forgot themselves: "They sacrificed their time, their health, their comfort for others."

The feast ends on its third day with the call to carry the Cross. The Church is where we learn to carry it.

Sacramental preparation and personal disciplines are kept under the guidance of one's priest. Confession and Communion belong to baptized Orthodox participants under their father of confession. Catechumens and inquirers follow their catechumenate, and everything here about prayer, honesty, forgiveness, and service is open to them now. None of these practices is a self-improvement technique; each is a way the union with Christ is lived.

Where is the Cross in this moment?

One situation at work:

You present your project to a group of stakeholders. One of them attacks your work in front of everyone. Part of it is true, but it feels personal. Your pride is hurt, and you want to defend everything and give up.

Three questions, for a small group or for honest private reflection:

1. What in my response needs repentance?
2. What would following Christ look like in the next five minutes?
3. What would self-denial not require?

Separate the feeling from the choice. Feeling hurt when an attack feels personal is not a sin. Wounded pride that will not hear the true part is where repentance begins; defending everything, including the part that is true, is self-justification; giving up on the project because you were hurt is resentment turned into action.

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

MATTHEW 6:14 NKJV

"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'"

LUKE 23:34 NKJV

Christ forgave from the Cross while the injustice was still happening; He did not wait for an apology. Following Him here is not a grand gesture. It is the next decision: a breath and a silent prayer before answering, admitting the true part out loud, saying you will correct it, offering to go through the rest after the meeting, and then finishing the presentation well. Self-denial does not require agreeing with every accusation, pretending the attack was fair, or staying silent about what is wrong in the criticism. It does not require letting one person humiliate you in front of the room.

There is more than one faithful response. What matters is three distinctions: feeling hurt is not choosing to give up; accepting correction is not accepting every accusation; humility is not passivity. Pope Shenouda III: "The right concept of meekness recognizes being connected with manliness, self-respect, courage and gallantry."

One honest surrender

Return to the mirror, now as a private reflection: **What am I protecting that Christ is asking me to surrender?**

- ✝ "Lord, I keep defending..."
- ✝ "With Your help, when this happens again, I will..."
- ✝ "The guidance or support I need is..."

Choose one real struggle and one concrete response. Keep your reflection private. Bring it into prayer and into appropriate spiritual guidance: the father of confession for the baptized, the priest and catechumenate for catechumens. The goal is neither emotional intensity nor a dramatic promise to change everything, but one specific step.

From the mirror to new life

"Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The destination of this teaching is not an erased person, but a person renewed in Christ. Paul still speaks of living his life, now through faith in the Son of God. The teaching ends in renewed life, not in the disappearance of the self.

What could become different in my next decision if I stopped defending my sin and began responding to Christ?

The lesson closes with the second litany after the Gospel in the Agpeya's Sixth Hour, prayed in the parish's usual translation. The reference text:

"O Jesus Christ, our God, who was nailed to the cross in the sixth hour, and killed sin by the tree, and by Your death You made alive the dead man, whom You created with Your own hands, and had died in sin. Put to death our pains by Your healing and life-giving passions, and by the nails with which You were nailed. Rescue our minds from

thoughtlessness of the earthly deeds and worldly lusts, to the remembrance of Your heavenly commandments, according to Your compassion."

Christ has loved me, and with His help I can respond.

Sources and further reading

Scripture (NKJV):

- ✝ [James 1:22–25](#)
- ✝ [Matthew 16:13–26](#)
- ✝ [Galatians 2:20](#)
- ✝ [Romans 6:3–14](#)
- ✝ [1 Corinthians 1:17–31](#)
- ✝ [John 12:26–36](#)
- ✝ [John 3:14–21](#)
- ✝ [Galatians 6:11–18](#)
- ✝ [John 6:35–46](#)
- ✝ [Mark 8:34–9:1](#)
- ✝ [Luke 14:25–35](#)
- ✝ [Galatians 5:24](#)
- ✝ [Matthew 6:14](#)
- ✝ [Luke 23:34](#)

The Feast of the Cross:

- ✝ [Coptic Synaxarium, 17 Tout](#)
- ✝ [Coptic Synaxarium, 10 Baramhat](#)
- ✝ [Readings for Sunday, September 27, 2026 \(Feast of the Cross\)](#)

- ✝ [Readings for Monday, September 28, 2026 \(18 Tout\)](#)
- ✝ [Readings for Tuesday, September 29, 2026 \(19 Tout\)](#)
- ✝ [Readings for Thursday, March 19, 2026 \(10 Baramhat\)](#)
- ✝ [The Feasts of the Cross \(Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Midlands, UK\)](#)
- ✝ [Feasts of the Cross \(Coptic Heritage\)](#)
- ✝ [Fr. Antonios Fekry, commentary on the Katameros for the Feast of the Cross \(Arabic\)](#)
- ✝ [The Feasts of the Church \(Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles\)](#)
- ✝ [The Feast of the Cross: the two feasts and their rites \(St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church\)](#)
- ✝ [Feast of the Cross \(St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Seattle\)](#)

Fathers of the Church:

- ✝ [St. Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word](#)
- ✝ [St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture 13](#)
- ✝ [St. John Chrysostom, Homily 54 on Matthew](#)
- ✝ [St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, chapter 6](#)

Pope Shenouda III:

- ✝ [The Word "I"](#)
- ✝ [Ten Concepts: Meekness and courage](#)
- ✝ [Repentance and grace](#)
- ✝ [Why is there death in baptism?](#)
- ✝ [The Spiritual Man: the spirit, the soul and the flesh](#)
- ✝ [How to Benefit from Pascha Week](#)

Prayer:

✝ Agpeya, the Sixth Hour

Optional further reading: Sayings of the Desert Fathers: Abba Macarius on becoming a dead man, a secondary page reproducing Benedicta Ward's translation; check against the printed edition before quoting it in teaching.