

## **Metropolitan Stefan's Meditation on the Third Sunday of Great Fast**

We hear the striking words of Jesus, "Whoever wishes to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Each of us chooses our perception of the cross. That perception largely determines how we will live and how we will die, how we come to deny ourselves and how we take up our cross and follow Jesus. Jesus accepted his cross. He encourages us to embrace the hardships in our life. Jesus fell with the burden of the cross three times. Jesus knows that in our frailty and in our weakness, we may fall many more times! Yet, Jesus Christ is always there to lift us up, when we trust in His loving care for us and when we realize how helpless we are without Jesus.

Jesus entrusted to all of us His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary to intercede for us. She helps us to see that love surpasses even grief. Jesus sends us help to carry our crosses. Simon helped carry Jesus' cross. There are many "Simons" around us to help us carry our burdens. We need to open our hearts to receive them. Veronica wiped the face of Jesus as he carried the cross.

How many times we are provided momentary relief in our sufferings, encouraging us to have a more courageous faith. Finally, Jesus died on the cross. The love of the Father did not prevent the suffering of Jesus, and did not prevent the cruel death of the beloved Son.

Why should we always be dreaming that, if God loves us, He will take away our crosses? Our love and embrace of our cross will save us, and through it, we will save many souls. Ask Jesus to help you to embrace your challenges and sufferings as you participate in the Great Fast services during the week in your parish.

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