

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
(Numbers 21:4-9 / John 3:13-17)
14.09.2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross. There is a paradox in the title of this feast: the Cross, -an object of torture and humiliation, an object destined to kill-, is exalted, glorified, venerated and sung! A Father of the Church – St Andrew of Crete – does not hesitate to write: “What a great thing it is to possess the Cross! He who possesses it possesses a treasure”. The Sacred Scriptures and the liturgy never cease to proclaim that by the Cross we are saved, that the Cross has become a source of life, pardon and mercy, a sign of reconciliation and peace. How can we hold together the two sides of this paradox: the ignominy of the Cross and its exaltation?

The key to this paradox is Jesus himself. If we want to understand the mystery of the Cross, it is fitting to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus who died on the Cross. Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to reveal the unconditional love of God the Father for every human being without exception. In doing that, Jesus met with a lot of opposition from the religious leaders of the Jewish people as well as from the Nations. But Jesus remained faithful to his mission until the end, whatever the price he had to pay. Finally, Jesus was arrested and crucified for his fidelity to his mission. As Jesus walked freely towards his passion, he did not allow his enemies to steal his life from Him. He gave it. Before his enemies came to take his life from Him, Jesus freely offered his life to his heavenly Father. He made this offering out of love for the Father and for all of us, for you and me. Jesus gave his life. His enemies did not take it from Him. **It is the free and loving offering of Jesus’ life on the Cross which made of the Cross a Holy Cross.** The confirmation of all that will come, an authenticating seal which will be opened, when on the third day, Jesus will rise from the dead. So, through the offering of Jesus’ life, the Cross – an instrument of death – became an instrument of life, worthy to be exalted, glorified and venerated.

When we contemplate the Holy Cross, it is important to note the **fidelity** of Jesus to the mission confided to him by his Father. We are also called to be faithful to our engagements, our life-choices and our decisions. Our engagements in life are multifaceted: let us think of the mutual fidelity of those united in the sacrament of marriage, fidelity to monastic or religious profession, fidelity to ordination to priesthood, fidelity to the exigencies of our baptismal commitment. As we try to be faithful, we cannot but meet with difficulties. These trials are the daily crosses that we are called to bear as we try to follow Christ. But our faith tells us that the mystery of the Cross is one with the Mystery of Christ’s Resurrection. So, if we situate ourselves at the level of faith, all the deaths that we meet with along the way are always deaths for life. They are the indispensable steps to be taken to lead us to fullness of life and happiness. If we faithfully die with Christ day after day, then with him we shall live already now and for ever.

The consequence of all that I am saying here is that the cross is also a sign of **hope**. Just as the Cross and the Resurrection are two facets of one unique mystery, so there is always hope for those who believe. Our lives are woven in a way that includes daily experiences of death. But there is always something positive beyond these deaths, there is always a future hidden in them.

Our daily deaths are sources of life, pardon and mercy; they are preliminary signs of reconciliation and peace. The point to grasp is that there is no hopeless situation, but only hopeless men and women. If we keep our eyes fixed upon both Christ hanging on the Cross **and** upon his resurrection, then there is hope for us in all situations. The Cross is an indispensable passage to eternal life, life with Christ.

Jesus on the Cross bids us to imitate him by offering our trials, our daily crosses to the Father out of **love**. This is the way that we have to follow. When we meet with our daily crosses (trials and difficulties of all sorts), we can allow them to destroy us; we can allow them to steal our lives, or instead we can offer our crosses to the Father out of love for him and for our brothers and sisters in humanity. This changes everything, for love transfigures death into life.

Yes, St Andrew of Crete was right: “What a great thing it is to possess the cross! He who possesses it possesses a treasure.”