

***Exaltation of the Holy Cross (A)***  
***September 14, 2014.***

*We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered* (Entrance Antiphon, Cf. Gal. 6:14).

Today's Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, one of the Church's oldest, celebrates the triumph of God's humility over man's pride *for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (1 Cor. 1:25). The first followers of our Lord evidently understood the centrality of the Cross; since the canticle that is our second reading today, taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, summarizes for us the Mystery of the Cross: *Christ Jesus...emptied himself... He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – death on a cross* (Phil. 2:6-11). This hymn is both a witness to the faith of the earliest Christians and a summary of what the Church believes about Christ our Lord. We call this *Christology*. The hymn successfully evokes all the phases of our Lord's existence, from His pre-existence as the eternal Word of God, to His Incarnation, Passion and lastly, His glorification and exaltation as Lord. When we gaze upon the Crucified Lord we see before us the most concise and comprehensive statement about the Word made flesh. *Jesus emptied himself*. The term that is given to this self-emptying is *kenosis*, a Greek word that expresses the self-abasement of the eternal Word of God in the Redemptive Incarnation. In the *kenosis*, our Lord's glory as the eternal Son of the Father is withheld, hidden. This affects every aspect of our Lord's human existence in a manner not fully understood by us. The Gospels tell us however, that our Lord's disciples were given glimpses of His glory, as in the Transfiguration and in the miracles He worked. The *kenosis* which defined our Lord's earthly life extends in the life of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church does not always reveal the wonders of God's grace at work in the souls of the saints. This is why St. Paul wrote: *your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory* (Col. 3:3:4). The *kenosis* of the Son of God is the triumph of God's humility and the path that defines our own life in Christ.

Throughout the ages those who have resolved to follow our Lord along the path of devout humility, have in a variety of ways given expression to these words of the Apostle Paul: *But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (Gal. 6:14). Christian discipleship is the embrace of the Cross, leading to a *participation* in its Mystery. We who endeavour to be disciples of Jesus can indeed participate in His sacrifice. *The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the 'one mediator between God and men.'* *But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, 'the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery' is offered to all men.... In fact Jesus desired to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering* (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #618). For this reason, tomorrow, the liturgy will celebrate our Lady of Sorrows, our Lady who is faithful at the foot of the Cross; and who by her example teaches us to be faithful and steadfast in the embrace of the Cross.

Our Lord declared: *Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple* (Lk. 14:27). What is the motivating force that enables us to carry our cross, follow our Lord and place our faith above all other goods? It is quite simply, the love of God. For St. Paul, who wrote so eloquently of the Cross, the glory of Jesus consists in the fact that He makes His disciples on earth willing and able to bear the cross after Him. This willingness to suffer with and for our Saviour, the Messiah, has always been enigmatic for those who have no faith; though the witness of this love and suffering has often brought others to faith. In our troubled times our brothers and sisters suffering persecution give faithful witness to this faith and love and we must pray to obtain strength for them.

We derive the strength to carry our own cross from the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Cross. The Eucharist teaches us that in dying to self, in our own *kenosis* we are empowered to live for God and for others. To *Love Crucified* we endeavour to respond with a *crucified love*, and through Holy Communion we participate in His Life and Love. Our own sacrificial love enables us to be one with our Lord as the work of our redemption is accomplished and our lives reflect in their own distinctive way the words of the Apostle: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Gal. 2:20).

The Holy Eucharist is a sharing in the life of Christ and belief in the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Most Holy Eucharist is the distinctive mark of the Catholic Faith. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Cross and the Cross is our strength. Christ Crucified is both the form and the content of the Christian message. Our fidelity to the Cross guarantees the authenticity of our discipleship and ultimately, our salvation. For this reason, each one of us in his or her own way must make our very own these words of the Apostle Paul: *But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (Gal. 6:14).

In a meditation written in 1939 for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, a day on which Carmelite Nuns renew their vows, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, the Carmelite Martyr wrote these timeless words: *The Saviour hangs before you with a pierced heart... Ave Crux, Spes Unica! [Hail O Cross, Our only Hope!] The world is in flames. The conflagration can also reach our house. But high above all flames towers the Cross. They cannot consume it. It is the path from earth to heaven. It will lift one who embraces it in faith, love and hope into the bosom of the Trinity. The world is in flames. Are you impelled to put them out? Look at the cross. From the open heart gushes the blood of the Saviour. This extinguishes the flames of hell... The eyes of the Crucified look down on you – asking, probing. Will you make your covenant with the Crucified anew in all seriousness? What will you answer Him?* (Elevation of the Cross, September 14, 1939: *Ave Crux, Spes Unica!* in *The Hidden Life, Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Vol. 4). What is our answer? *But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*” (Gal. 6:14). Only if our faith is strong, only if our faith is authentically Eucharistic will we be able to conquer and be victorious in our struggle with the world and the enemies of our faith.

Many, sadly, have fallen away and have turned from the Cross; and a cross-less Christianity is perhaps one of the subtlest temptations of the Antichrist. We know however, that salvation is ours

only through the power of the Cross. Let us be generous in suffering with and for our Lord and live and love like Him. To *Love Crucified* we endeavour to respond with a *crucified love*. There is no better way of being united to His redemptive work than to be mindful that the Mass is Calvary. Every day the Divine Sacrifice of Calvary is re-presented in our midst. With our Lady of Sorrows at the foot of the Cross we are present as Jesus perpetuates the redeeming efficacy of the Sacrifice of the Cross through the hands of the priest. Let us adore and venerate the Sacrament of the Cross, the Blessed Eucharist and let us ask our Lady to pray for us; that we may obtain the grace to persevere along the path of devout humility in the embrace of the Cross whose power to save excludes no one. *Let us then follow Christ's paths which He has revealed to us, above all the path of humility, which He himself became for us* (St. Augustine, Sermo 23A, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, p. 189).

*We adore you, O Christ and we praise you. Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the whole world.*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVpEvPn-YDw>)