

God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

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On Thursday the Church celebrated the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The story goes that in the year 326 AD the Cross which Jesus was crucified on was found in an old trash heap outside of Jerusalem by the mother of Emperor Constantine, St. Helena. The Holy Cross, also called the True Cross, became the celebrated treasure of the Roman Empire. Fifteen years after the finding of the Holy Cross, a Basilica and shrine, the Holy Sepulcher was built over Golgotha. There the Holy Cross was displayed and venerated. Three hundred years later the Persian army invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the Holy Sepulcher and captured the relic of the Holy Cross. For fourteen years, the Holy Cross was in the hands of the Persians until the King of Persia's own son overthrew the king and returned the cross to the Roman Emperor. The Emperor, to the amazement of all, carried the Holy Cross on his own shoulders, in imitation of our Lord, back to Calvary. According to legend, when he reached the gate to Calvary, the gate refused to open for him to pass through. Only after the Emperor had taken off his crown and splendid robes could the gate be opened and could the humbled Emperor then return the Holy Cross to Calvary.

The Emperor learned the truth which St. Paul expresses so elegantly in the Epistle, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* Only after he had cast off the symbols for the riches and the wealth of the world, laid aside his own glory as the Ruler of the Byzantine Empire, could he finish carrying the Holy Cross to Calvary. The Emperor learned something that day of what it takes to follow Jesus. And, of course, the same is true for us. We each have a cross to bear, and

simultaneously we are called to carry the Cross of Christ throughout the world, and for the rest of our lives, and to lay aside that which keeps us from carrying our crosses faithfully. Jesus says, *If any many will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself.* St. Paul laid everything aside so that he could better carry his cross. He desired to do and teach only that which God commanded instead of what men thought was best.

The Cross is the sign of salvation to us and to the world. St. Paul was faithful to the truth that the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ had fulfilled the old law. His answer to those who would make the early Gentile converts into Jews was all who come to the Cross of Christ are no longer Jew or Gentile. The Cross reminds us of the necessity of obedience to God over the popular ideas of man. But this does not just apply to theological arguments, for Jesus says, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on....seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* We cannot serve God and worldly fame and fortune. We cannot take up our crosses and follow Jesus and follow the lure of Mammon. Only Jesus can teach this because He has overcome the world and its anxieties through the Cross. We may wonder, in a world which seems to run on anxiety and materialism, what this looks like in the life of a Christian. In some ways it is really very simple; We are called not to be anxious over anything, to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and to surrender everything at the foot of the cross. The difficulty comes in the surrender, in the letting go and casting aside as the Roman emperor cast his

imperial crown and royal robes aside, as he humbled himself to continue his journey to Calvary.

To be sure, this is easier said than done. To reach the Kingdom of Heaven we each will have to walk the road to Calvary and the journey will be hard and difficult. But a life without a cross is not pleasant either. The Lord warned Moses and the children of Israel of this long ago. He warned that if they walked away from Him and follow Mammon *(their) life shall hang in doubt before (them), and (they) shalt fear day and night, and shalt have no assurance of (their) life*. The truth is that without the Cross, we are consumed with all the anxieties and worries of this world. When we exalt the kingdoms of this world above the Kingdom of Heaven, we forget all about our destiny and future with God through Jesus Christ, the Crucified One. This is what we look forward to when we glory in anything other than the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. All the anxieties we hear of in this morning's Gospel will become our reality. We shall be anxious for everything, even for our food and drink. We shall be anxious for what we shall wear, and we shall be anxious for our very lives, unless we take up our cross and follow Jesus.

The Cross of Christ is harsh, it is rugged, it is a double-edged sword condemning the world and showing us who bears our sins. It is the Tree of Life, the gateway to Heaven, the promise of salvation and sanctity, and it calls for every Christian and it will take believers to God's Kingdom. By the Cross the Lord has won our salvation. The Lord longs to divide asunder our sinful passions and anxieties with His life-giving cross. By it He places our anxieties in perspective, he reminds us to *be not anxious for what you shall eat or what you shall drink*, for from this Cross, He has given us His own body and blood to feed our souls. *Be not anxious*

for what you shall wear, for the Lord has set aside for us a spotless robe, a robe more glorious than the lilies of the field, more glorious than Solomon and all his splendor. *Be not anxious for your life*, for by this Cross the Lord has won for us all Everlasting Life. It is by the Holy Cross that Jesus points the way through the world to His Heavenly Kingdom.

An instrument of cruel death, of torture and pain, has become the trophy of victory over the world. By it, Jesus has conquered not only the world, death, and the grave, but all the forces of darkness, every anxiety, every pain, and every sickness. Its form has been imprinted upon our very souls through the waters of Baptism and by the Holy Cross we are marked and set apart as Christ's very own. It is our Christian identity which we must embrace. Let us take up the crosses we have been given to bear. The crosses of anxiety, grief, depression, illness, poverty. We have been given them because Christ wants us to overcome them by taking them to Calvary. *Let us glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world. Amen.*