

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 Tuesday of this week the Church celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. According to sacred tradition in the year 326 AD the Holy Cross had been found in an old trash heap outside of Jerusalem by the mother of Emperor Constantine, St. Helena. The Holy Cross was the celebrated treasure of the Roman Empire, and rightfully so. On the same day, 15 years after the Holy Cross was found, the Basilica and shrine which was built over Mt. Calvary was dedicated. It quickly became a major pilgrimage site. There the Holy Cross was displayed and venerated. Three hundred years later the Persian army invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the holy Basilica of Calvary and captured the sacred relic. 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 Heraclius. Emperor Heraclius, to the amazement of all, carried the Holy Cross on his own shoulders, in imitation of our Lord, back to Calvary. When Emperor Heraclius reached the gate to Calvary, a great miracle occurred. 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.

Emperor Heraclius learned the words of St. Paul literally, *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 riches and the wealth of the world, shed his own glory as the Supreme Ruler of Byzantium, could he finish carrying the Holy Cross to Calvary. 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, for the entirety of our lives. We also are called to heed St. Paul's words to glory in nothing other than the Cross of Christ, to be crucified to the world, so that the world might be crucified to us. We are therefore called not to be anxious over what we shall eat or drink, what we shall wear, or about our lives. For anything that hinders us from seeking first the Kingdom of God is to be surrendered at the foot of the cross and cast aside as the Roman emperor cast his imperial crown and royal robes aside to enter 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. *Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou*

*shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.* 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 a part of the Christian identity which we must embrace. We must also embrace the crosses we have been given to bear. The crosses of anxiety, grief, depression, illness, poverty, have been given to us because Christ wants us to overcome them by taking them to Calvary. For in taking them to Calvary and embracing humility, the gates of Heaven will open to receive us. St. Thomas a Kempis, in his book *The Imitation of Christ*, encourages us. He writes *Why are you afraid to take up your cross, since it is the only way to the Kingdom of Heaven? In the cross is salvation and life; in the cross is defense against our enemies. Through the cross heavenly sweetness is poured into our souls, our minds are strengthened and we experience spiritual joy. In the cross is the height of virtue and the perfection*

*of sanctity. Without the cross there is no salvation for our souls, nor hope of life eternal. Take your cross, then, and follow Jesus, and you will go into everlasting life.* May we heed the words of St. Paul this morning, and glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world. Amen.