

## 15th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Dear brothers and sisters!

A few days ago (September 8), a new church year began. And we celebrated the birthday of our Mother Mary! The Lord called to life a tiny baby named Mary to begin the mission of salvation. For we had lost our freedom, becoming slaves to the devil's passions, and needed to be set free.

Dear believers, let us focus our thoughts today on the way of the cross shown us by our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Let us open the doors of our hearts so that we can feel the love with which God loves us. We can remember the events from the life of St. Francis. Every day, praying before a crucifix, he embraced the crucified Savior with love. And one day, the image of Christ on the crucifix came to life, and Christ embraced Francis with his wounded hands.

The Apostle Paul writes of the Holy Cross thus: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.... We proclaim Christ crucified, [which] to those who are called, whether Jew or Greek, [is] Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor 1:18; 23-24) And in his letter to the Galatians, Paul shares this experience of his spiritual life: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified and me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).

How many of us in life face crosses, trials! But if we know how to recognize them and how to carry them, then such crosses and trials become a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light (Mt 12:30). Truly the cross becomes life-giving!

Today's feast recalls the history of the rediscovery of the Holy Cross. After Jerusalem was captured by the Romans in AD 70, the Temple was completely demolished, all Jewish shrines were destroyed, and not a stone in Jerusalem was left unturned. Places considered sacred to Christians were also desecrated, and a pagan temple was built on Calvary itself, the holy mountain where the Savior of the world died for us. The mountain came to be littered with garbage. But in the early fourth century, Christianity became a permitted religion. As it spread and flourished among the nations, the pious Queen Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, decided to find the place where the Savior had suffered, to find Golgotha

and the cave of Christ's resurrection.

The pagan temples were destroyed, and three crosses were found at the site of Golgotha. To determine on which of the three crosses Jesus had been crucified, the three crosses in turn were touched to a dead man. When the dead man was touched by the cross on which the Savior had been crucified, a miracle happened--the man came back to life. Many people gathered to see the Life-Giving Cross. And the patriarch of Jerusalem raised it up, lifting it high so that all might see. From that time to the present day, we celebrate this majestic feast day—the Exaltation of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross of the Lord.

We have a tradition of placing the symbol of Golgotha, Mount Calvary, in our churches. Icons depict at the foot of the cross a dark cave with the skull of Adam and his bones. According to the Gospels, Jesus was crucified at the Place of the Skull, the literal meaning of the Hebrew Golgotha and Latin Calvary. Thus, the cross was “planted in the earth” to unite the earth and the underworld with heaven.

These liturgical symbols and images all have a very specific purpose—to open our hearts and minds to the words of Christ: “Whosoever wished to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25).

The cross is not only a symbol of our salvation, but also an integral part of our earthly life. Everyone has their own cross. But the cross can become life-giving only when we voluntarily accept it and follow Christ.

Today, we are experiencing a crisis in human relations. The crisis of our time is a lack of love in human relationships. People seek happiness in earthly things without feeling the needs of others. They are not interested in the inner world of others' thoughts, feelings, desires, experiences. Rather they live in a world of their interests and pleasures. This creates darkness in the world because of the lack of God's presence, truth, love, and goodness.

Therefore, as we worship the Lord's Cross on this feast day, we sing with the Church the troparion: “We bow to Your Cross, O Lord, and we glorify Your holy Resurrection.” The cross is inextricably linked with the resurrection, because it is through the cross that “the joy of the whole world came,” the joy of the new life given by Christ.