

Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Dear brothers and sisters!

Today, on the Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross of the Lord, we hear the Gospel in which the evangelist Mark tells us the words of Jesus Christ: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mk 8:34).

This means that we are able to renounce all that is associated with sin, selfishness, and a life that is beneficial only to ourselves. After all, he who lives only for himself will lose everything. And he who lovingly gives himself to the service of others, who knows how to share everything he has, will gain even more. “To deny oneself” means to look around and learn to see not only yourself and your own sorrows and joys, difficulties and successes, but also to see others, who also have their own joys and sorrows.

That is why the Lord tells us these words: “What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mk 8:36). Let's think about that: No matter what a person achieves, if his soul does not grow spiritually in perfection at the same time, does not become nobler, does not become enlightened—everything will be in vain. And looking around we are well aware of this, for clearly we can see that material well-being alone does not make people better and happier. It is important that we be enlivened by God's truth, enlightened by His grace, and walk in the way of God's commandments.

Each of us carries our own cross in this life. Sometimes we do not understand why the Lord allows us certain trials, difficulties, or sorrows. Sometimes we complain, for we do not know how to accept in a Christian way what we are going through. However, always remember that the Lord never allows what we cannot endure. If we trust Him, we will always feel His support, love, and blessing.

The cross on which the Savior died opened the way to heaven and became an apology to our Heavenly Father for human sin.

We have to choose to which kingdom we want to belong and in which kingdom we want to live. The devil, who has long been and is still the prince of this world (cf. Jn 12:31), is still fighting against those who belong to the Kingdom of God. Above all he wants to destroy those people living in the Spirit whom God has called to spread the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The devil understands that when you strike a shepherd, the flock will scatter (cf. Mk 14:27).

Jesus Christ has remained in this world in the Holy Eucharist and is constantly with His people. The Savior comes to our aid in our fight against evil. He gave us his cross, a powerful weapon in the fight against the devil. The Savior pointed out the mighty power of the cross to Emperor Constantine when he went to battle against the unfaithful Maxentius in AD 325. According to the historian Eusebius, Constantine and the whole army saw in the sky a large cross, clear as the sun, and above the cross the words: “Through this sign you shall conquer.” Thereupon the emperor ordered that a banner of the cross be made and carried before the army. His army went on to defeat the overwhelming forces of Maxentius.

The emperor's mother, Helen, thought that if the image of the Cross had such power, what greater power must the cross on which the Son of God was crucified have. So she went to

Jerusalem to find the Cross of the Lord. Three crosses were excavated in Jerusalem as I discussed in last week's homily, the Cross of Christ and the crosses on which the two thieves were executed. Just as the dead man was revived by being touched with one of the crosses, the Cross of our Lord, so too was a seriously ill woman immediately cured when she touched the true cross, the Life-Giving Cross of Christ. The power of the Lord's Cross flowed to the people and to the world.

After these events, the Emperor Constantine ended the persecution of Christians and by special decree gave freedom to the Christian faith. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is commemorated in memory of this event.

I am going to conclude today's homily with a story of a man who was dissatisfied with himself and others and who often complained, "Who said everyone should carry their cross? Is there really no way to get rid of it? I have had enough of my daily sorrows and worries!"

In a dream God gave him the answer. The man saw the earthly life of men as an endless procession. Each person walked, carrying a large cross, step by step, with great effort moving forward. This man also trudged along in this endless stream of people, carrying the burden of his cross. However, he soon noticed that his cross was longer than other people's. A thought flashed through his mind as to why his was so heavy. The man decided to shorten his cross a little so as not to suffer so much. He sat down along the roadside and shortened it well. When he set off again, it was faster and easier. At last he came to the place which the end of his earthly journey. The man found himself in front of a deep abyss, and on the other side he saw the Land of Eternal Joy. Its amazing beauty could be seen from afar, but there was no path around or bridge cross the chasm. Yet, somehow people were getting there. The man saw that the other people were removing their crosses from their shoulders and throwing one end to the other side of the abyss. Each cross was the perfect size: each person could use his cross to connect the two edges of the abyss. Thus they were able to cross over into this fabulous land of eternal glory. In the end, all people passed over except for one man—the one who had been complaining all the time and had shortened his cross. Now he realized that his shortened cross would not bridge the chasm and allow him to cross the abyss of death. In desperation, he began to cry, "Oh, if I only I had known!" It appeared, however, that it was too late for him. Fortunately, the man woke up and thanked God that it had just been a dream.

Dear believers, let us ask God that the power of the Lord's Cross may help us to bear the daily crosses of life, to give us strength in patience and comfort in sorrow, to help us in the fight against evil, and to protect us in temptations. Let us honor the Cross of the Lord early in the morning, when we get out of bed, by making the sign of the cross to glorify the Holy Trinity. We should do this with respect and faith, because it is a force against the devil. Similarly, in the evening, when we go to bed, let us mark ourselves with the sign of the Cross, so that our night may be calm and peaceful.

May the Cross of the Lord instill in us strong faith, hope, and love for God. Remember, the Lord is always with us. By the power of the Cross we will overcome evil, and the peace of God will reign in our hearts and in our families.