

September 14th: The Exaltation of the Cross

Gospel text (Jn 3,13-17): Jesus said to Nicodemus, «No one has ever gone up to heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world; instead, through him the world is to be saved».

«So that whoever believes in him may have eternal life»

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Today, the Gospel is a prophecy, that is, a glance into the mirror of reality that plunges us in its truth, far beyond what our own senses tell us: the Cross, the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ is the Saviour's Throne. That is why Jesus asserts, «the Son of man must be lifted up» (Jn 3:14).

We do know the Cross was the most ignominious and heinous torture of its time. To exalt the Holy Cross would therefore be some sort of cynical joke, was it not because the Crucified is hanging on it. The cross, without the Redeemer, is sheer cynicism; but with the Son of man the Cross is the new tree of Wisdom. By «freely submitting himself to the passion» of the Cross, Jesus Christ has opened the substance and purpose for our lives: to be lifted up with him to the Holy Cross to fling open our arms and our heart to God's heavenly gift, in an admirable exchange. Here too, we must listen to the Father's voice that came from the heavens: «You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased» (Mk 1:11). To be crucified with Jesus and resurrect with him: that is the reason for it all! There is hope, there is a meaning, and there is life! We are not mad when, we Christians, during the Paschal Vigil, in a most solemn way, that is, in the Easter Proclamation, sing a hymn of praise to the original sin: «O happy fault! O necessary fault of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!», who, through his pain has infused a new “significance” to pain.

«See the tree of the cross, where the Saviour of the world was crucified: come and venerate it» (Good Friday Liturgy). If we manage to overcome the scandal and insanity of Christ crucified there is nothing else for us to do but to worship him and be grateful for his Gift. And to decidedly seek the Holy Cross in our own life, to fill us up with the certainty that, «through him, with him and in him», our donation will be transformed, in the hands of the Father, for the Holy Spirit, in eternal life: «Shed for you and for many in the remission of sins».