

14 September 2024 - Feast of the Glorious Cross

[Num 21:4-9; Phil 2:6-11; Jn 3:13-17](#)

Homily

Our missals tend to call today's feast the 'Feast of the Glorious Cross'. This is undoubtedly a very beautiful expression, but the traditional name for this feast, which is a literal translation of the Greek name, is 'Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross'. The word 'exaltation' is admirably ambiguous. It can refer to the movement of raising the cross on which a condemned man is standing (in the very act of crucifixion), or it can refer to the movement of raising the cross high, as a sign of triumph, to give glory to God.

We find an equally strong ambiguity in Jesus' words as reported by John: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself". The Cross is at the centre of the Christian paradox, or rather it is the very tip of it: life comes from death, the Cross is lifted up to give life, a crucified man is the source of life. This paradox is the sign and foretaste of the great eschatological reversal of situations promised by God: those who mourn will rejoice, the barren woman will give birth, the poor will reign, the hungry will be satisfied and the dead will live.

The Christological hymn quoted by Paul in chapter 2 of his Letter to the Philippians, which we had as our second reading, describes well how the supreme exaltation of Christ, in his resurrection, is an upward movement that follows that of his descent among us, in his incarnation. He who was equal to God lowered himself, annihilated himself and became obedient to the point of death on the cross. *That is why* the Father exalted him and gave him the name above every name.

Taking up one's cross, that is, accepting to suffer even when innocent, is an essential dimension of following Christ. The same applies to self-denial and obedient imitation of Christ, who took up his own cross out of love for us all.

To be able to accept the presence of the cross - or suffering - in our lives, just as to be able to love and let ourselves be loved, we must overcome fear. There is an innate fear of suffering in human beings, just as there is a fear of loving and being loved, along with the desire to love and be loved. In reality, to grow, both humanly and spiritually, we have to overcome many fears.

First of all, we have to get rid of the fears we had as children and which we may have carried with us into our adult lives - fears which

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may have been well-founded when we were children, but which are now completely irrational. Among them is the fear of suffering, which is probably never pleasant, but without which there is no life - no birth and no growth.

And then there are all the fears that do not belong to us, but are passed on to us: those that haunt people close to us and that we easily make our own; those that are transmitted by the media and that are so easily used by politicians and demagogues. The date of 11 September 2001 will remain the symbol of all our collective fears, so easily exploited.

Finally, there are our own fears, those that are rooted in our personal lives, linked to the wounds of the past or the experience of our own sins. It is above all these that we need to be freed from - that we need to pray to God to free us from. Being freed from our fears does not necessarily mean making them disappear, but rather preventing them from paralysing us. Jesus, in the Garden of Olives, as he approached his supreme descent into death, was seized with anguish to the point of breaking out in a sweat of blood. It was in the full acceptance of suffering, despite anguish and fear, that he deserved to be exalted by his Father into eternal glory, after being exalted (= lifted up) on the wood of the cross.

' When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself... '. Among those whom Jesus drew to himself from the height of his cross was his mother Mary (tomorrow we will be celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows). This woman, who was certainly no stranger to suffering herself and who had once baked her family's daily bread, gave us her Son as the bread of life. The Eucharist we celebrate every day confers the power of Christ's cross on all our daily sufferings, great and small, as well as on the sufferings of humanity, and thus enables us to share in his exaltation to the right hand of the Father, that is to say, in his 'glorious cross'.

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