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Meditations: September 14, Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

09/14/2023

- The Cross, a reminder of Christ's love
- The meaning of the Cross
- Symbol of victory

“WE SHOULD GLORY in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered.”^[1] — The Church begins her celebration of the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross with these words based on a verse from Saint Paul. Today we can look with special devotion at the wood of the Cross. Although centuries ago it spoke of death, today it speaks to us of life and freedom. For Christians, the Cross of our Lord is not a tragedy, but a source of salvation.

Lovers look with special affection at places or objects related to their loved one: the place where they first met, the photo of a special moment, the gift that accompanied a declaration of love... All these little reminders hold a special value. The Cross is the place where Jesus has come to seek, with the greatest mercy, a humanity that has strayed.

There the Son of God shows his solidarity with all men and woman, especially with those who are suffering or seem to have lost all hope. The Cross speaks to us about Christ's special relationship with each person who opens up their heart to his consolation and forgiveness.

During their wandering through the desert, the people of Israel looked at a bronze serpent hung from a pole to be healed (cf. *Num* 21:4-9). Jesus announces to Nicodemus that, in messianic times, *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life* (*Jn* 3:14-15). In turning our eyes to the Cross, we are reminded of all that Christ has done for us, beginning with the sacrifice that restored God's life to us.

UNDERSTANDING the authentic meaning of the Cross is not easy. Saint Peter sincerely loved our Lord, but at first he didn't understand what Jesus meant by the announcement of his Passion, and Jesus had to rebuke Peter when he tried to dissuade Him from giving up his life (cf. *Mt* 16:21-23). Nevertheless, years later the apostle will grasp its meaning more fully, to the point of also being willing to die on the wood.

Saint Josemaría encouraged us to discover in the Cross a call to identify ourselves with Christ; that is, to see in the wood of the Cross not simply a reminder of a past event, but an invitation to discover its great relevance today in our own life. “You ask me: why that wooden Cross? And I copy from a letter: ‘As I look up from the microscope, my sight comes to rest on the cross — black and empty. That Cross without its

Crucified is a symbol. It has a meaning which others cannot see . . . for the lonely Cross is calling for a pair of shoulders to bear it’.”^[2] —

For some, the Cross is silent, and seems to announce only pain. But for Christians it is an invitation to be generous, to unite ourselves to Jesus, who wants to grant us the capacity to always live with love and not give in to the consequences of sin. On the Cross, our Lord restores wounded human nature. Accepting the greatest injustice, Jesus does not allow resentment, disobedience or hatred to find a place in his human heart. Only someone with the strength of God is capable of this. Christ on the Cross “recreates” mankind, enabling us to receive a new life that is given to us in the sacraments. Carrying the Cross is not only a matter of “patiently enduring daily tribulations, but of bearing with faith and responsibility the toil

and suffering that the struggle against evil entails. Thus the endeavor to ‘take up our cross’ becomes a participation with Christ in the salvation of the world.”^[3] —

“FOR A CHRISTIAN, exalting the Cross means entering into communion with the fulness of God’s unconditional love for mankind.”^[4] —
Embracing the Cross is an act of faith by which we seek to live solely from the love that Christ offers us. Hence Saint John Chrysostom reminds us that the Cross closely accompanies the Christian life, and that it is a source of joy: “Let no one, then, be ashamed of the sacred symbol of our salvation, of the sum of all goods, of that to which we owe our life and being.”^[5] —

From the Cross, our Lord continues to draw to Himself a multitude of men and women: *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (Jn 12:32)*. It is easy to imagine the ardent conviction with which Jesus would have uttered these words, as the time drew near for Him to lay down his life. For the Cross is the moment of definitive triumph for Him, the path to win over the hearts He loves so ardently. It is the throne from which He reigns and which symbolizes “the victory of love over hate, forgiveness over revenge, service over domination, humility over pride, unity over division.”^[6] —

We can go to our Lady, who had the strength to stand at the foot of the Cross accompanying her Son.

“Invoke the Heart of Holy Mary, with the eagerness and determination to unite yourself to her sorrow, in reparation for your sins and the sins

of all mankind,” Saint Josemaría advised. “And ask – for each soul – that her sorrow may strengthen in us our aversion to sin, and help us to love, as expiation, the physical or moral sufferings of each day.”^[7] —

^[1] — Roman Missal, September 14, Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Entrance Antiphon (cf. *Gal* 6:14).

^[2] — Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 277.

^[3] — Francis, Angelus, 30 August 2020.

^[4] — Benedict XVI, Speech, 14 September 2012.

^[5] — Saint John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 54, 4-5.

^[6] — Benedict XVI, Speech, 14 September 2012.

^[7] — Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 258.

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