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The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Trinity XIV) 09/16/01

## Holy Cross Day

"In the cross of Christ I glory, towering over the wrecks of time." So says the great hymn we sing this Sunday in our celebration of the Holy Cross.

There is no more glorious contemplation in the Christian faith. Nothing draws us more directly into the substance of Christianity than our meditation on the passion of Jesus.

In the history of the Church, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross stems at least from the seventh century, when it was claimed that the true cross was recovered and revered. But such significance, bound to material objects of this world's fashioning, simply cannot hold the true and everlasting meaning of its original and only use.

It is in the Cross that the great dogmas of the Church, that of the Trinity and of the Incarnation and of the Atonement, converge and coincide. The Son cries out to the Father and holds Him close in the faith of His dereliction. His sinless life, full of grace and truth, suffers in every joint and sinew. His perfection of love fulfills the law, which the disobedience of a thousand worlds cannot defeat.

And so at the center of every celebration of Holy Communion is a recollection of His suffering, and every great feast and each saint's day find their path through the same remembrance. Christmas looks from a distance at the appointed death for which the Savior is born. Easter rejoices in the victory of the agony overcome. Pentecost drinks deeply of the passion's universal power. The cross is the at center of spiritual reality, and therefore at the center of our liturgical life; it is the fulcrum on which grace moves time into eternity.

To borrow Eliot's idea, the sacrifice of Jesus is the still point. The passion is still because in its simplicity, its pure unique simplicity, it needs nothing to improve it. The passion is also a point because its effect extends backwards and forwards into the past and the future; its forgiveness and love reach out in all directions, the perfect act of the God-man establishing the way to God and confirming His love to the end.

With Holy Cross Day, we remember these things. And as we do we find our way into the act and effect of the cross. It seems impossible that we can do this that we can participate in the reality of the cross. Only Jesus can suffer so perfectly. But our way into His passion is not the

result of our own virtue. Our coming to Him flows from the cross as well.

Our entering into the reality of the cross begins with humility, humility not of our making, but of His. It was His own submission to the Father's will, an obedience enacted out of love, that placed Him within our world, for us to see and to hear, to kiss and to crucify. His eternal and infinite power took the form of human weakness, and within the contingencies of history, He served the will of God.

Humility such as this is personal. Indeed the humble obedience of love in Jesus reveals to us the nature of absolute personality. What is manifest upon the agony of Calvary is the essential attitude of the Son of God toward His Father, and in the Son's humility we must see the issue of the Father's as well, for He loves the world so much that He gave His Son for it.

When we enter the glory of the crucified Lord, we embrace this personal gift. We cannot stand back and keep the humility of God at a distance. His must become ours, in the dimension of obedient and personal love. Oh, yes, we are confronted by His justice and moved by His mercy, 'but it is His own quiet participation in our death, the death laid down for his friends, that draws us to Him.

And in being drawn to Him we know all we need to know. The personal humility

of Jesus manifests infinite goodness and effectual power. Only He who is pure in heart can see His way through the death He dies in the stead of others. He offers Himself to the Father, and by His death the sheer weight of goodness satisfies the will of God for His creation. Nothing of evil, neither act nor thought nor intention has any part in Him. This is His most personal gift.

Humility and Goodness, the gift of Himself, is the work of the Cross. Its inherent power derives from what and who He is. His justice is therefore accomplished, and His mercy made sure, because these are the intentions of His being, His knowledge and His love. The glory of the Crucified is His own glory displayed for all to see and to believe.

What will our response be? Belief and adoration surely. But then what? Will the cross be merely the subject of beautiful hymns or a season of the church's life, which we strive to enact? Or will the cross of Jesus be a seed, like His death is a seed? "Except a com of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

Will the humility that is His become ours and our lives become an offering to God of obedient love? If so then we shall begin to love as He loved, and to obey the new commandment that He enjoined. It will not be easy, indeed we shall fail miserably. But the energy of such faith and hope will not run dry with our failures. His love is sufficient, and His patience as sure as His perfect sacrifice.

Step by step we learn the humility of Christ And we do not attain to His by our own efforts. Rather, He Himself is our beginning and.. our end, His love absolutely sure. For now our place, beneath the light of His Cross is to pray that we may follow in the way of His sacrifice and

find it none other than the way of life and peace. And the cross shall be life and peace, until finally we bow our knee before His blessed Name, and confess Him as our everlasting Lord.

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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