

14. September 2024

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
The Cross: sign of salvation

Phil 2:6-11

Christ, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Only from the perspective of love can the Cross of Our Lord be understood in depth. If we do not acquire this vision, we cannot understand the true message: *"For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son"* (Jn 3:16). Without love, all that remains before our eyes is the cruelty of crucifixion. As "just and necessary" as it is to contemplate each of the Stations of the Cross, to weep because man is capable of such cruelty, to be moved and pity the Lord, simply remaining in silence beside Him; it is important to remember and deepen again and again the motivation of the Father and the Son in this salvific event: it is love.

God wants to redeem humanity, and for this he chose the way of the Cross. Sin and its consequences have obstructed mankind's access to God. It is necessary to remove the obstacles, and this requires the forgiveness of sins. Not only that, but sin brings with it many consequences: a profound disturbance in the relationship with God and with one another. All of creation suffers the consequences of the separation from God that sin brought about. No human being could have borne this burden on behalf of others down through the ages. Only God Himself, who became man for us, could pay the price for our guilt through His voluntary passion and death: *"He has wiped out the record of our debt to the Law, which stood against us; he has destroyed it by nailing it to the cross"* (Col 2:14).

This is the reason why the Father chose this way for the Redemption of humanity. In His Son, He Himself bore the guilt and its consequences. God did not choose a victim of atonement from among men, but offered Himself as a victim, giving Himself in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of man. In Him, He became the slain Lamb of the Old Covenant; in Him He suffered the cruelest treatment; in Him He faced mockery and humiliation; in Him He allowed Himself to be crucified for the sins of men.

By contemplating the Lord in His immeasurable suffering, we can discover His love. As the Church has always taught us, it was not only the Jews and Romans of that time who were guilty of His death, but it was also our very own sins that crucified Him. Since Jesus died for the sins of all humanity, we too are involved and co-responsible for His death. Because of our sins, the suffering of our Redeemer was necessary. Thus, without ceasing to lament the wickedness of those who caused the Lord so much suffering (including ourselves), the cruel events surrounding the Cross can awaken in us immense gratitude, for the Lord walked this path for us to the end. In every step, in every torture, in every humiliation, in every mockery we understand: this is the treatment men gave to God, but He endured it for us, to redeem us.

"Let us, then, have no fear in approaching the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace when we are in need of help" (Heb 4:16).

The Cross of Christ has become the throne of grace. Every person can come to it and obtain forgiveness for their sins. This throne is established for all time, until the consummation of the world. All may draw near, both those who are far off and those who are near, to drink from the fountain of life and receive the grace of forgiveness.

Only God alone could devise such an offer of grace, and only He Himself could make it available to us! Thus God manifests Himself to us as the infinitely loving Father, who gives us the source of grace and absolves us in His Son.

The event of the Cross inaugurates a new time: the time of grace, in which God's mercy is proclaimed; the time in which all men and women are to be touched by the salvation offered to them in Christ. This new stage, which has been opened to us with the Lord's sacrifice, will last until His Second Coming at the End of Time.

In this way, God reversed the infamous plans of the Evil One, who sought to extinguish the witness of the Son of God. The Cross has become the sign of Redemption! In the Cross, God's light shines more brightly, pushing back the darkness of evil. And in its light we can recognize that God has done all things well (cf. Mk 7:37).