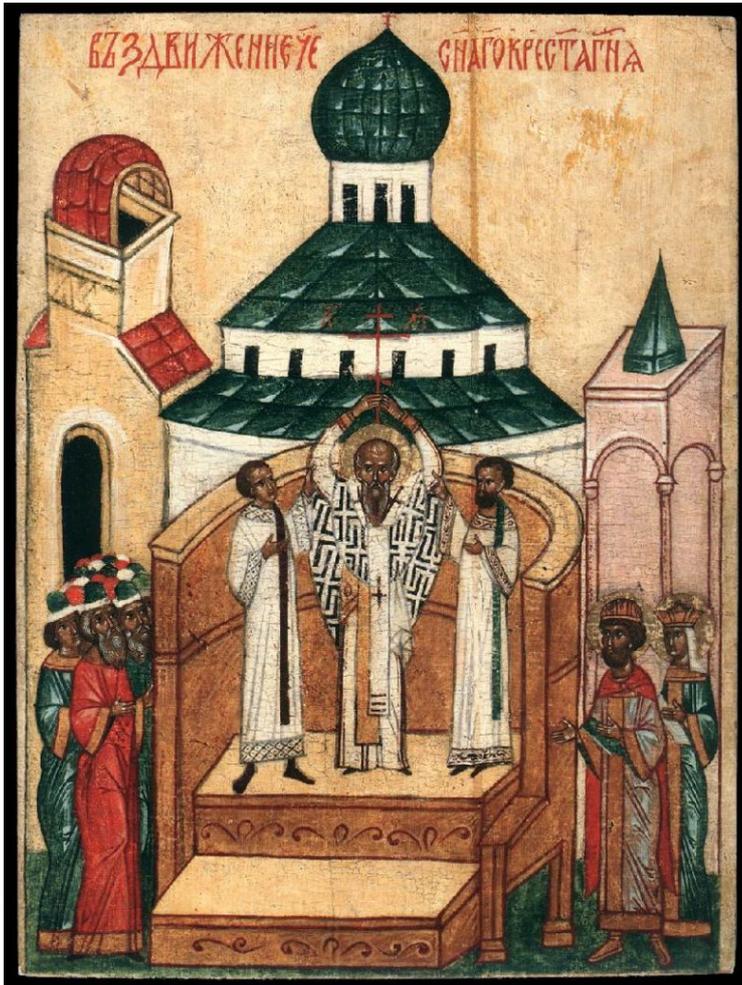


THE LIFE GIVING CROSS

“Many live as the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil.3,18).

The Cross is the symbol of Divine Love, of salvation of the whole humanity. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”** (Jn. 3,16). This is the good news and the core message of the entire New Testament/ Covenant. Sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, who ate the fruit of the forbidden tree; salvation came for humanity through the obedience of the ‘last Adam’, **Jesus Christ** (cfr. 1 Cor. 15, 45), ‘who willingly accepted the death on the cross (cfr. Phil. 2, 8) **becoming ‘a life-giving spirit’**. Even though Jesus is Risen and is seated at the right hand of the Father we find meaning in the crucifix – the cross with Jesus crucified – because the crucifix that we wear, kept in our churches, homes and institutions is a constant reminder for us of what Jesus has accomplished for us through his death on the cross. It is the symbol of the whole summary of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, which we proclaim till the end: ‘Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again’. So **we honour the Crucifix as the most sacred object and symbol of our faith.**



The Exaltation of the Cross

– *unknown Russian painter (WGoA)*

Human spirit and reasoning can never understand the mystery of suffering and the Cross. But it was fitting for the wisdom of God to 'make the pioneer of our salvation **perfect through suffering**' (Heb. 2,10). The Holy Spirit has revealed through St. Paul: "The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. We proclaim Christ Crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For **God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength**" (1 Cor.1, 18; 23-25)

Am I ready to accept the foolishness and weakness of God which, in turn will be my real wisdom and strength; or do I prefer to accept the wisdom and strength of the world which

will result in my destruction. As St. Paul points out: **“Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction”** (Phil. 3,18 – 19).

We Christians are called to ‘consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 6,11). We are called to live the joy and glory of the resurrection. But we know that it is only by going through the ‘Good Fridays’ of life, that we can reach the ‘Easter Sunday’. So Christ crucified is our strength and hope. Saul, a Roman citizen and great scholar of that time, (having studied under Gamaliel, an eminent Teacher of the Law) who was persecuting the followers of ‘The Way’, had a tremendous transformation of life after his confrontation with Jesus on his way to Damascus (see Acts. 9,1-22). He became fully convinced of the ‘wisdom and power of God’ hidden in the ‘foolishness and weakness’ of Crucified Christ. So he said: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2,2). He had no complaint of ‘carrying the marks of Jesus Christ branded on his body” (Gal. 6,17), for he was sharing the desire of God that everybody be saved, and hence was willing to go through ‘the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in all’ (Gal. 4,19). **“May I never boast of anything except the cross of our lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”** (Gal.6,14).

The Cross, which in former times was a sign of torture, shame and curse, has become for us a sign of salvation, victory over the powers of darkness, source of deliverance from the bondages and curses, sin and Satan – all because of Jesus’ death on the cross. **“We speak of God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”** (1 Cor. 2, 7-8). Yes, the cross was a mystery for human mind, in the past as well as in the present. But those who are spiritual, led by the Spirit of God, discern all things. When Jesus foretold

about his suffering and death to his disciples, Peter, our first Pope, was reluctant to accept it (see Mt.16, 21-23). But after being filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day, he was enlightened about the 'mystery of the Cross' "**If any of you suffer as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name**" (1 Pet. 4,12-16).

The crucifixion of Jesus has great significance for the entire humanity. "For he was slaughtered and by his blood he ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language, people and nation. He has made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth" (Rev. 5, 9 – 10). The historical event which took place at Jesus' crucifixion was this: "It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land, until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn into two. ...When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent". And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their chests" (Lk. 23, 44-48).

But the people of 'this world' always want to hide the 'truth coming from above' (cfr. Jn. 3,31). In order to prevent Jesus' disciples finding the cross, they threw it into a pit and covered with stones and mud. St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine could succeed in tracing the Cross on September 14th, 326 AD. Among the three wooden crosses which they got after digging various spots at the hill of Calvary, the real cross was discerned through the miraculous healing of a sick woman and the coming to life of a dead man who was being carried to burial, when both the bodies were brought into contact with the cross. To commemorate the finding of the Holy Cross, Constantine dedicated two churches on Mount Calvary. Later the Persians attacked Jerusalem and carried the Cross to Persia.

The Catholic Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on 14th September specially commemorating the Recovery of the relics of the Holy Cross from the Persians by Emperor Heraclitus in 629.

The Emperor Constantine who was wavering between Paganism and Christian Faith was given a sign: A sign of the Cross appeared on the sky and he heard a voice .Through this sign of the Cross, you will gain victory in the battle. The king gave order to his soldiers that they wear on their shields the symbol of cross .Constantine won the battle of the Milvian Bridge.

We have every reason in reassuring our faith in joyously praying: “We adore you Oh Christ and we praise you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world”.

Mary Pereira