

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross of our Lord. We enter the Church this morning and we fall on our faces in veneration before the Holy Cross, and in worship before our Saviour who was nailed to the tree and died for our salvation. Everything in the Christian Church points to Christ, and the defining moment in the life of Christ is the Cross. As St. Paul writes, "We preach Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

This is our message as the Body of Christ to the world. We don't preach health and wealth, we don't preach prosperity, we don't give "feel-good" pep talks, we don't say that everything's all right. We preach the Son of God, incarnate of the Virgin Mary, on the tree of the Cross for our salvation, rising from the dead on the third day, ascending into heaven, and seated even now at the right hand of the Father. This message is our boast.

St. Paul also writes to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel" (Romans 1:16). The Cross is just as much a stumbling block or folly for people today as it was 2,000 years ago. The mindset of the world wants us to preach Christ the Philosopher, Christ the Wise Man, Christ the Healer. Anything but Christ the Crucified Son of God. This is a great temptation for the Church today-to modify the message of Christ to be more appealing to modern ears, to present Christ as people want Him to be. But carrying the message of the Cross to the world is the only way to truly give them Christ. The Cross **is** the message of God for the world.

The Cross shows us that the world is broken; the world is evil; terrible things happen in this fallen world. The fulfillment of man is not to be found in the fleeting pleasures and desires of this life. God came into the world, lived a perfect life, revealed Himself to mankind, and the result is the Cross. Of all of the things that have happened over the course of human history, the Cross points most clearly to the fallen-ness of the world.

The Cross also shows us that in spite of sin and brokenness, God loves us. The love displayed on the Cross is unfathomable. The pain, the humiliation, the degradation that God allows Himself to be put through is beyond our ability to comprehend or understand. The Creator of all allows Himself to go through all of this humiliation, and ultimately to be murdered on the Cross. A God who would never naturally feel physical pain or suffering, allows Himself to suffer on the Cross, placed there by His own creation. And He does it all to show us His love-to show that no matter what we do to Him, God will offer us forgiveness, and God will love us.

And finally, the Cross shows us that God has something better than the life that we live in this fallen world in store for us. This belief is not escapism, as some non-Christians will claim. We

are not interested in escaping the realities of day-to-day life in this world, we're called to face and overcome the world in Christ. But we also know that this world is not the end, and God's plan for us will be fulfilled in the age which is to come. And this age is revealed through the Cross, in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We preach Christ and Him crucified, but St. Paul also writes, &quot;If Christ be not risen, our faith is in vain&quot; (1 Corinthians 15:14).

We can't compromise our preaching of the Cross, because these are things people must see and hear-the world is broken, it doesn't work like it's supposed to; nevertheless, God loves us, even though we're responsible for the destruction of His creation; and there is something better promised for those who cling to this Cross, and follow Christ wherever He may lead.

As we reflect today on the Feast, and on the death of our God on the wood of the Cross, spend some time with the question-&quot;How have I received the Cross of Christ?&quot; Have I denied it, have I ignored it, have I taken it for granted, have I put it down and walked away, or perhaps I'm dragging it along behind me somewhere? Or am I struggling, as the Gospel preaches, to take up the Cross, and to follow Christ? &quot;What is my response to the Cross of Christ?&quot;

We'll end with the words of one of troparion for the Feast (from Litya at the Vigil):  
*&quot;The Tree of True Life was planted in the Place of the Skull and upon it, eternal King, Thou hast worked salvation in the midst of the earth. Exalted today, it sanctifies the ends of the world. Angels in heaven greatly rejoice, and men upon earth make glad, crying aloud with David and saying: 'Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool, for He is holy and grants the world great mercy!'*&quot;

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!