

Vatican City, September 14th 2020

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

September 14th, 2020

Dear Knights and Dames,

we are preparing ourselves to celebrate and live the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This feast, which in the East is compared to Easter, is linked to the consecration of the Constantinian Basilicas built on Golgotha and on the sepulcher of Christ and to the memory of the discovery of the Cross of Jesus by Saint Helena, Emperor Constantine's mother, which, according to tradition, took place on September 14th, 320.

In Matthew's Gospel 16: 24-25, Jesus says: "If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses it because of me, will then find it. "What's the point of even gaining the whole world then, if mankind loses his life?"

Saint Paul in Rom., 12-2 applies all this and affirms: "Do not conform to this world, but allow yourself to be transformed, renewing your way of thinking, so that you can discern the will of God, which is good and perfect".

When you hunt down the worldliness fashions, you conform and flatten yourself on sterile and enslaving models of life, letting go of your own thought, your consciousness, the important and fundamental values of life as the absolute value of life itself. Jesus, still in the Gospel of Matthew 16:23, reminds and reproaches Peter: "You do not think according to God, but according to men": it seems that today, even in the young generations but not only, there is the fear of not being "like everyone else".

Rather, as conscious people, as Christians, we are and should be different, new, alternative, truly profound and genuine, fully aware of being unique, irreplaceable, smart and free. Being like everyone else, or as according to an "unique relativistic thinking", is the worst, it is the presupposition of an opaque existence.

Jesus said: "You are in the world, but you are not of the world".

In this regard, it seems to me to call for reflection on certain passages of the *Letter to Diognetus*, a Christian document from the 2nd century that I think it is very relevant:

“Christians do not differ from other men in terms of territory, manner of speaking, or style of their clothing. In fact, they don't live in particular cities, they don't use a strange language and they don't adopt a particular way of life. They then reside in Greek and Roman cities, as it turns out, and while following the customs of the place in how to dress, how to eat, and the rest of life, they come up with, as everyone has admitted, a wonderful and amazing form of life. They live in their own country, but as if they were strangers; they respect and fulfill all the duties of citizens, and bear all burdens as if they were strangers; each foreign region is their homeland, but each homeland for them is a foreign land. Like all other men, they get married and have children, but they do not abandon their wives and children. They do not live according to the desires of the flesh. They live on earth, but have their citizenship in heaven. They observe the established laws but, with their way of life, they are above the laws. They love everyone, even if they are often persecuted”.

Today, we Christians too - and even more so as Constantinian Knights - are called to live and operate in contemporary society, to recognize and value its positive aspects, but we cannot afford to be enslaved by a dominant and arrogant culture which tends towards exasperated secularism in the name of a false sense of respect and of a materialist and atheist humanism.

The veneration of the cross is replaced by the idolatry of wealth, pleasure, power. And we know that money should only be a means for a sober, dignified life open to love. Jesus also said: "Why is it good for a man to even gain the whole world if he loses his own life?" We Christians must respond to savage hedonism as a search for pleasure as an end in itself, with the knowledge of the value of the cross, that is commitment, consistency, sacrifice. And again: in the search for power as the only absolute goal, we can respond with the joy of service, to always seek the good so as not to become slaves to one's career and personal prestige - perhaps trampling on one's neighbor. Jesus said: "Whoever wants to be the greatest, must be the servant of all”.

Life is beautiful when is lived in the awareness of a great outcome, of an eternal destiny that is built day after day with commitment, in the responsibility of one's duties, recovering the greatness of knowing how to say *thank you* from the heart, knowing how excuse: here we find the cross Jesus is talking about. Life is fully fulfilled when there is love, giving, sharing, seeking good and not selfishness: it is the “lost life” Jesus talks about, in order to be able to find it truly and fully.

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