

Courtesy translation

Vatican City, 14 September, 2021

But far be it from us to glory
except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;
He is our salvation, life and resurrection.
(Galatians 6:14)

Illustrious Knights and Dames,

I have the joy of reaching you again this year with a spiritual reflection for the occasion of the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, to which our Order is particularly bound.

I would like to read with you, on this feast – in which we speak of “exaltation” – the invitation and exhortation of the Church to *humility*, so that faced with the mystery of Christ’s Death on the Cross, all of us may experience our littleness and fragility. It is by specifically looking at the mystery of the Cross raised on Golgotha, that we too may catch sight of the true meaning of this virtue. The liturgy, too, which we celebrate today commemorates the total abasement of Christ: “Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-11). God, Who loved and loves man so much, sent His Son, Servant *among* and *for* men, dying in infamy, finally rising in glory.

So, from this feast, we must above all derive this teaching, so as to ensure that the virtue of humility will become over time a real and personal *habitus* with which to draw closer to God and our brethren, living out every day with little daily actions, the Charity which Christ the Lord taught us.

We all have experienced during this time of the pandemic that charity – going far beyond mere philanthropy – often expressed with a gaze of welcome and solidarity towards one’s brother with small gestures able to make Christian amiability visible and concrete. This is the exhortation of St. Paul when he said: “Rejoice in the Lord always [...] Let all men know your forbearance.”

In celebrating the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Church wishes to remind us that glory belongs only to God, praise belongs only to God. We are also exalted with Christ, but without Christ our exaltation would be only vainglory. And in fact, again, the Liturgy comes to our aid, as it recites in the Entrance Antiphon: “But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; He is our salvation, life and

resurrection.” (Galatians 6:14) Faced with these words, we too, Constantinian knights and dames, must feel the urgency and desire to turn the Cross we wear on our mantle from a simple symbol into a real and deeply Christian lifestyle with which to witness to our Faith in simplicity and daily life.

Our attitude of humility, besides making us amiable to our brothers, allows us to recognize our weakness and littleness compared to God, without abandoning ourselves, however, to discouragement when faced with difficulties. This experience was also that of the Psalmist, how many times do we read in the Psalms after great hymns of praise to God, lamentations of deep discouragement, real and personal crises of faith which render him almost incapable of recognizing God’s action. In all of these circumstances, however, the Psalmist, humbling himself, continues to sing to the glory of God and to pray. In us, too, the desire to follow Christ, the Model of love to look to in simplicity and within the limits of our abilities, must always remain unchanged, not letting discouragement and anxiety gain the upper hand over us. When it does not seem possible to us to respond in a manner keeping with the total gift of God to man, let us remember that “when God loves, nothing else is wanted than to be loved. He does not love for anything else than to be loved.” (St. Bernard, *Discourse on the Canticle of Canticles*). This is also what Pope Francis reminded us: “When we raise our eyes to the Cross [...] we contemplate the Sign of love, of the infinite love of God for each of us, and the Root of our salvation.” (Francis, *Angelus* of 14 September, 2014).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I wish all of you to celebrate in the best possible way this feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: looking at the Cross on which Christ gave His life, let us also seek in daily life to look with loving and kind eyes at our brethren, loving them as the Lord has directed. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

Celebrating this feast in communion with you, all of us can have a foretaste of the joy revealed at the culmination of Holy Week: after the terrible occurrence of the Cross, the glory of Easter’s Resurrection with which Christ reestablished our fallen humanity and “drew all to Himself” (John 12:32). Before the scandal of the Cross, with wonder and joy, we discover that: “this is the mystery of love: Jesus come down from Heaven, to allow us to ascend into Heaven: this is the mystery of the Cross.” (Francis, *Homily* of 14 September, 2017).

Making my own the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, I impart the blessing: “Raising our eyes to the Crucifix, we adore Him Who came to take on Himself the sins of the world, and to give us eternal life. And the Church invites us to lift high with pride this glorious Cross, so that the world may see how far the love of Crucified One for men, for all men, went.” (Benedict XVI, *Homily* of 14 September, 2008).

With my fatherly blessing,

Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino

Grand Prior of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St. George