



Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò

IN HOC SIGNO VINCES

Homily on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

*Tum Heraclius, abjecto amplissimo vestitu detractisque calceis ac plebejo amictu indutus,
reliquum viæ facile confecit, et in eodem Calvariæ loco Crucem statuit,
unde fuerat a Persis asportata.*

*Itaque Exaltationis sanctæ Crucis solemnitas, quæ hac die quotannis celebrabatur,
illustrior haberi cœpit ob ejus rei memoriam,
quod ibidem fuerit reposita ab Heraclio, ubi Salvatori primum fuerat constituta.*

Then Heraclius cast away his princely raiment and took off his shoes from his feet,
and in the garb of a peasant easily finished the remainder of his journey,
and set up the Cross once again in the same place of Calvary whence the Persians had
carried it away.

Therefore the solemnity of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,
which is celebrated annually on this day, became thenceforth more illustrious,
because it had been replaced by Heraclius in the same place where it had first been
planted by the Savior.

Lect. VI – II Noct.

In the seventh month, during the Feast of Tabernacles, Solomon performed the rites of consecration of the ancient Temple (1 Kings 8:2, 65); on September 14, 335, on the anniversary of the same, Constantine dedicated the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, to symbolize how the place of Burial – the *Martyrium* – and of the Resurrection – the *Anastasis* – together constituted the new Temple of Jerusalem. The Roman Basilica of the Holy Cross was built by the Empress Saint Helena to house the relics of the Holy Wood after her return from her trip to the Holy Land in 325. It was there that the cult of the Cross of Christ spread throughout the Catholic world – as Dom Prosper Guéranger recalls – and

has persisted to this day. In 614 the Persian king Khosrow II invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the Constantinian Basilica, took possession of the True Cross and – in a gesture of impiety that aroused the indignation of the faithful – used that blessed wood to make his own throne. In 628 the emperor Heraclius defeated and beheaded Khosrow, reconquered Jerusalem, rebuilt the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, and brought to Byzantium – *abjecto amplissimo vestitu detractisque calceis ac plebejo amictu indutus*, barefoot and dressed as a pilgrim – the precious relics of the Holy Cross.

The historical events – because we are talking about documented history corroborated by highly authoritative testimonies – that led to the spread of the cult of the Cross and the feast of its Exaltation that we celebrate today, must not distract us from a spiritual and supernatural aspect that is fundamental for each of us. The Cross on which Our Lord shed His Blood and died for our Redemption has been running through the history of humanity ever since. According to the *Golden Legend* of the Dominican bishop Jacopo da Varagine, St. Michael the Archangel ordered Seth (the son of Noah) to put three seeds of the tree of life in the mouth of the deceased Adam: from those seeds a tree was born that Solomon had cut for the construction of the Temple, but which he could not use, and which he then had buried at the bidding of the Queen of Sheba. That wood was found at the time of Christ and used to make the Cross, then recovered by Saint Helena after the Jews had hidden it to remove it from the adoration of the faithful. As proof of its authenticity compared to those on which the thieves were executed, the Holy Wood resurrected a dead man simply by being touched to him.

Our worldly mentality, infected with an incredulous rationalism that has nothing scientific about it, feels uncomfortable in the face of the narration of prodigious events that, through the millennia, unite Adam to Christ. It is difficult and almost embarrassing to believe a story transmitted through the centuries in which it speaks of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, of the humble faith of Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena. And it is always the secularized mentality that makes us feel the Cross as an unbearable yoke, as a sign incomprehensible to the world, in which the Blood of the Savior impregnates the fibers of the wood, keeping the most holy Body of the incarnate God nailed and torn apart by the Passion. Instead of the horrible torments of the Cross, the Conciliar Church prefers the tranquilizing image of a Christ who is risen and removed from the sorrows of the Passion. The world rejects the Cross because it does not recognize its sinfulness and therefore does not accept Our Lord's redeeming Passion. *Si filius Dei es, descende de cruce* (Mt 27:40): it is the temptation of those who do not understand that there is no victory without combat, nor the triumph of the Resurrection without the sufferings of the Cross.

The secularized spirit, which has penetrated the Church with the complicity of a Hierarchy without Faith and without Charity, has imposed this horizontal vision which nullifies the Redemption of Christ, His Incarnation, and His Passion. If “all religions are a path to God,” as Bergoglio blasphemously stated a few days ago in Singapore, no Savior is needed; nor is

there any need for a Church that is an instrument of salvation in the world; nor is there any need for a Pope, who is a bond of unity in the Faith within the Church. Yet this “pope,” for whom anyone can be saved without the Revelation of Christ, claims to be recognized and obeyed by Catholics as the head of that Church which he blasphemously considers useless; and in the name of a usurped power he even dares to excommunicate those who denounce his apostasy.

Three times each year, we kneel before the Cross in adoration: on Good Friday, on the day of its Invention or Finding [May 7], and finally today, on the feast of its Exaltation. We do it *duplici genu*, with both knees, as before the most august Sacrament: an external gesture of adoration invites us to contemplate those two bare pieces of wood, which have crossed history and which still represent the *discrimen* (the watershed) of human events, until the end of time, when it will be the Cross that will shine in the sky, as anticipated by Saint John in the Apocalypse (1:7). Before the Cross we kneel, stripping ourselves of ourselves, as Christ himself was exposed to humiliation and opprobrium like a criminal deserving of death. And before the Cross all creatures must kneel, *cœlestium, terrestrium et infernorum* (Phil 2:10), so that the fruit of death gathered by our First Parents in disobedience to God’s command may become the fruit of eternal life in the Sacrifice of the new Adam; a fruit that has ripened down the centuries through preparation in the Old Law, until fulfilment in the new and eternal Covenant; a fruit sprinkled with the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb, who spares us and saves us at the passage of the exterminating angel (Ex 12:13). That Tree of Life that was the cause of our death in Eden is reborn on Golgotha as an instrument of torture and death, to give us true Life, the life of Grace, of friendship with God, with the Most Holy Trinity, life restored in Christ, true God and true Man.

Let us therefore return to the Cross, dear brothers, because it is truly *spes unica*, as we sing in the ancient hymn *Vexilla Regis*. It is *the only hope* because in the Cross we understand the *necessity* of the Passion, in the plans of a God who becomes incarnate to redeem the servant, *felix culpa*. It is the only hope because the joys, riches, well-being, success, money, and pleasures of this world are all fallacious and deceptive. With them Satan keeps us attached to creatures, to prevent us from raising our spirit to the Creator; he binds us to fiction, so that we do not grasp reality; he deceives us with ephemeral things, while the Lord grants us the Grace to enter into eternity. Only in this way can we understand why some saints – like Saint Francis, a model of poverty and renunciation of the world – were privileged by Christ precisely in bearing the Stigmata of the Passion. Each of us must have those Holy Wounds mystically imprinted on our souls, in the self-denial that costs us so much but which alone makes us truly similar to Our Lord.

Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me (Lk 9:23). Self-denial consists in embracing *our* cross, and in carrying it *daily*, every day, following Christ to Calvary. And it is our cross, that is, the one that Providence has destined for us – whether small or large – and not the one that *we* want to choose for

ourselves, believing ourselves capable of carrying it with our own strength. We have *our own* cross and also our own supernatural graces that allow us not to be crushed by it. This is the test, the *certamen* to be faced, if we are to attain the eternal reward and be admitted into the presence of God. Let us accept it as Heraclius, *detractis calceis ac plebejo amictu indutus*, so that by stripping ourselves of the garments of this world – which we are ineluctably destined to abandon – we can with Saint Paul be clothed in Christ with the new man, *in justitia et sanctitate veritatis* (Eph 4:24). And so may it be.

+ Carlo Maria Viganò, *Archbishop*

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In Exsultatione Sanctæ Crucis D.N.J.C.