

Jesus gives the grace to bear crosses of daily life

By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

In the Byzantine tradition, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is one of the 12 great feasts of the church. We lend our attention to the cross for a simple reason: through the cross, salvation has come to the world.

Through the death of Jesus Christ, we receive new life, eternal life. Jesus explains this to us in the Gospel of St. John.

The mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is to be exalted on the wood of the cross (Jn 3:14).

He parallels the lifting up of the cross to Moses, who lifted up the serpent on the wood, so that all who looked upon it were healed (Nm 21:4).

This is a sign also for us, for serpents in the desert signify death. We can receive true healing, that is eternal life, only through the holy cross on which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is exalted in glory.

What does it mean to proclaim that we believe in Jesus Christ? It means to believe in his love, his love that hung on the cross for us.

As Christians we are invited to participate in Christ's way of life. If we want to receive eternal life, we are invited to love. This is not easy to do in our daily lives, in our families, in our schools, at our jobs, and so on. Our reactions are not always motivated by love, but by other reasons.

For this reason, we need to look upon the cross of Jesus Christ every day. It might be nice that a bishop or priest wears a cross or carries it in his hand, or that we wear the gold cross from our baptism. But to wear the real crosses in our life is not easy. Our crosses may be our spouse, our pastor, our bishop, our neighbors.

To accept these crosses is difficult. Understood with the logic of this world, the pain that comes with these crosses is useless.

The mind of Christ thinks about these things differently. The paradox of Christ and the Holy Cross is that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to die for us.

And God's love for us is so big that this love wins over these present torments. His love wins over death, sin and the devil.

If we are to have a weapon to fight in this world, it is not a nuclear one. This is a big mistake.

The weapon for us to use in this world to gain eternal life is love. On every page of the Holy Gospel, Jesus Christ invites us to use the weapon of love.

Despite the difficulties we face in loving, do not be afraid to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It is possible.

All of the saints on the iconostasis had to make the same decision about whether they believe in the way of Christ's love or not. We have two possibilities: to accept Christ and his way of life or to deny him.

So I pray for you, brothers and sisters, that you accept the possibility to love through the holy cross, for it is only by having the holy cross in the center of our lives that we can receive eternal life.

Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, help us and give us the grace to be able to bear the cross and to offer to each other — our husbands, our wives, our parents, our children — love, so that we can receive the promise that you have pledged to all of your followers. Amen.

God bless you,  
+ Bishop Milan

*This text is based on Bishop Lach's homily at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist on the Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross, Sept. 10.*

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