

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

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[0 : 00] This morning we celebrate the feast of the Holy Cross. For the cross of Jesus is the heart of our faith and our life.

As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 23 and 24, St. Paul summarizes his life and ministry with those words in Galatians chapter 6 verse 14, Friends, the cross is not a mere symbol to observe.

It's not simply a piece of jewelry to wear. It's a life that we are called to participate in daily. It is our life in Jesus Christ.

And this new life is given to us in holy baptism. You see, baptism is not merely a symbol or testimony of one's belief. It's the act of God whereby he washes us, he cleanses us, and then he sets us on a new path.

And we are now called to follow him, to follow this new path all the days of our lives. But this new path is not easy.

[1 : 43] It is narrow and difficult. The promise of our Lord, however, is that he will never abandon, he will never leave us. We belong to him because he has cleansed us and he has set us free through the waters of holy baptism, where we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who now leads us and guides us.

Therefore, the cross of Christ is our hope, our comfort. It is our life until all eternity. Our purpose in life as followers of Christ is now to take up our cross daily.

By living in the grace that we received in holy baptism, knowing that we have a purpose and a mission in life as children of God. We don't just wander aimlessly.

St. Paul makes this abundantly clear in Romans chapter 6, verses 3 and 4, where he says, Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Notice that language of participation. Therefore, we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

[3 : 10] That's our purpose. Friends, we witnessed a death this morning as Nate was baptized into Christ.

But we also witnessed a resurrection, a new and regenerate life. And this death and resurrection is to be the rhythm, not only of Nate's life, but of all of our lives.

You see, we, like Nate, died with Christ in baptism. We were buried with Christ in baptism. And we were raised to new life in baptism.

And we are now called to die daily. To die daily to sin by confessing our sins and by living a life of repentance.

That is, turning away from our sins and turning to Christ. And we do this knowing that we were raised with Christ to walk this new path.

[4 : 11] To have a purpose in life. But this new path, as I said before, is not easy. It's a difficult road.

That's why it's called the narrow way. But we do not walk alone. We are led by Christ as the cross is to be front and center of our lives in all that we do and all that we say.

Death and hell have been swallowed up by Jesus in his own death and resurrection. And that's why we have hope even in the midst of hardships.

Even in the midst of sufferings. Even in the midst of temptations. St. Paul proclaims death has been swallowed up in victory by our Lord's resurrection.

Therefore, even though the path is difficult, it is narrow. And even though it can be discouraging. We need to put our faith and trust in Christ and the cross be ever before us.

[5 : 20] Sometimes we stray from this path. Sometimes we will fail to gaze upon Christ and his cross and begin slipping into the mess of our own sin.

Sometimes we might even fall into old habits. Or as St. Paul says, the great St. Paul says in Romans chapter 7, For the good that I will to do, I do not do.

But the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now, this is not an excuse for lawlessness or sin. But it's a reminder that baptism is the new beginning of a new life.

Baptism is where we are born again. Therefore, like any newborn child, we are called to grow. We are called to mature in this new life, in this grace.

And that growth means there will be times where we stumble and we fall. And during such times, we need to confess our sins.

[6 : 23] Come clean. We need to make the sign of the cross that we received in holy baptism. We need to be reminded of our participation in our Lord's death and resurrection.

We need to remember that in baptism, we were helpless, unable to save ourselves. And that the only thing we had to offer God was our sin-filled lives.

In such times of weakness, we ask for mercy. We ask for grace. We ask for forgiveness. And we ask that our Lord put us back on that straight and narrow path.

During such weakness, our gracious Lord not only restores us, he feeds us. He gives us his life with his very own body and blood as we now make our way through this life and the hope and the assurance of the life to come.

Just as baptism is not a mere symbol or a personal testimony of what we have done. For it is the objective, decisive act of God on our behalf.

[7 : 35] It is what God does. So the Eucharistic meal is not a mere symbol. We read in 1 Corinthians 10, verses 16 and 17. Paul says, The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?

The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? We are one, united. United to Christ.

Through baptism, where he forgives us, where he feeds us, as we make our way on this difficult journey under the banner of his cross. He is the bread of life.

Our calling then is to allow the light of Christ that we received in baptism to fill us. And then to shine through us. As we heard our Lord say in our gospel text this morning from John chapter 12, verses 35 and 36.

Our Lord says, Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. He who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.

[8 : 48] While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light. The path is lit. Not only for Nate.

It's lit for all of us. We receive the light of Christ in holy baptism. And now we are to walk in this light. This means we need to remember who we are. Our identity. We are children of God. Who have died, been buried, and raised to new life.

And the cross of Christ is our identity. It is our identity. And it is our purpose as we seek to follow the light given to us in holy baptism.

And we partake of the life of God in Christ Jesus, which is the meal he gives. He is the bread for our journey in the holy Eucharist.

[9 : 48] As already stated, this life is not easy. It's a difficult path. There is no sound theology that says God has a wonderful life filled with happiness and bliss for all the baptized Christians.

Run away from such false teachers that preach this lie. It's demonic to the core. As baptized Christians, we died. And every day is to be a death to our own sin, to our own pride, to our own passions.

And that's hard. But that is the calling for all who follow Jesus. But our joy is that being regenerate, being incorporated into Christ through the means and gift of holy baptism, is that we do not walk this road alone.

There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity. We walk this road being led by our Savior who has already blazed the trail before us.

And he makes this path possible for all of us. We walk empowered by the Holy Spirit who connects us to Jesus in the physical means of water, bread, and wine.

[11 : 08] And the whole church in heaven and earth surrounds us, surrounds Nate, and prays for all of us as we walk the narrow path of Christ Jesus.

And we are to do this every day. Today, what was an instrument of death, an execution chamber, the cross, is now Nate's life.

It's now our life. As we share in the death, the burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus as baptized children of the living God.

Today, we celebrate Holy Cross. And Holy Cross, the cross of Christ, is the tree of life. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.