

September 14, 2014  
Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross - Cycle A  
Father Larry Richards

Good Morning! Today is one of those rare days when a Feast is celebrated on a Sunday. We celebrate, of course today, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Now again, I don't think, I just don't think, I know we don't really get what it means. Because, again, it's kind of like for the early Christians, they knew exactly what it meant – this instrument of torture. It's kind of like for us holding up a hangman's noose. You know, we put that on our lapels and we carry it everywhere, and they think, "These people are nuts." It's the same with the cross in the early Christian community when they said this is what we glory in. St. Paul in Galatians, Chapter 6, verse 14 said, "I may never boast of anything except for the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ." So Paul would say this is the only thing I will boast of – the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

When we think about it, it becomes so commonplace to us – even in this church. I was saying how we have so many crosses in our church and of course, Bill Smith was here yesterday and afterward he told me how many crosses we have in the church. Do you know how many crosses we have in the church? 61. 61 crosses in the church because if you go – each station has a cross, and a double cross and there is a cross up there and there is a cross in her arm and there is a cross in each of the candles – there are crosses everywhere. 61. Do not count them during my homily. Do not even begin. Some of you are looking, "Oh, let's see," you're going to in la-la land. Oh, no! So anyway, we exalt in the cross.

Did you ever get it on Good Friday, we put a big cross here or crucifix and we come up and we genuflect to a cross. Why? Because the cross is the instrument of our salvation. I'll be you nine out of ten priests this week are going to preach on how we need to accept our crosses in our life. I'm going to deal with that a little bit at the end. But, this isn't supposed to be about us today. It's supposed to be what Christ did for us. That's why we have the Exaltation of the Cross – what He did for me.

In the Old Testament, when they sinned against God and God sent the seraph serpents to bite them and kill them, then they cried out to the Lord and He held up a serpent which again is what they use for the medical symbol now, and whoever looked when it was held up was brought to life. Jesus uses the same analogy when He uses imagery when He says, "Unless I be lifted up and when I am lifted up on the cross, everyone who believes will have eternal life." So, it's what Christ did on the cross for us is what we exalt in today, what we rejoice in today. It's why it's a Feast day today – that He paid the penalty for me and He paid the penalty for you. What you and I first have to do is have this heart which is grateful.

I wonder if you boast, of course, nobody boasts here. I boast. After I was out, someone a couple weeks on the way out said, "Oh Father, you were boasting." And I said, "Oh, I guess I was". So anyway, we boast. Everyone here boasts on something. You can boast about your kids. You can boast about your job. You can boast about your house. You can boast about your parish but I wonder how many would boast about the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ? I wonder if just one person here boasts about the cross

of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Yet, Paul would say, "that's the only thing that I will boast about – nothing else matters except the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ." So, when we think what do you and I boast about – our self or the cross of Jesus Christ for what He did for us.

Again, if Christ didn't die on the cross for us, we are all damned forever. Do you know that? Do you really believe that? If He did not die on the cross, you and I are damned forever. It's what He did for us is why we will live forever. So, we need to boast of the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That's got to be the most important thing to us. That's why it's important that you have a cross in your house. If you say, "Oh, I'm a follower of Jesus" but if I come to your house and there is no cross, I'd say again, "I don't think so" because in your own house the only boast a Christian should have is the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. But, you don't have a cross in your house? Really? So, you boast about what football team you like. You boast about what hockey team you like. You boast about what high school you went to. You boast about the pictures of your kids but you don't boast about Jesus? Really?

So, the first thing I want you to think about is do you boast about Jesus in your house and can you prove that by having a cross of crucifix in your house. Maybe it's first thing that someone would see when they walk into your house because they usually think that's what you are about. Wow – walking into your house, I see a cross and I think your house is boast for you about the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. So again, just to give us a thought, am I grateful first of all for what Christ did for me? Do I tell Him I'm grateful and do I boast about it somehow in my life? Minimally by having a cross of Christ in my life. You cannot go into the church here, even in the bathrooms, even at my house, there is a cross in every room. Often when people go to my house and they are going to the bathroom and they look up and there is Jesus on the cross and they feel really embarrassed by it and I say, "Excuse me, Christ on the cross needs to be everywhere – even in the bathroom. While you are sitting there you can be looking at Jesus on the cross. That'd be OK". This is what we boast in, the cross of Jesus Christ.

The second thing is then, of course, after we've been grateful, after we've boasted about it, now Jesus says, "No one can be My disciple unless he picks up his cross and follows in my footsteps." Now, what we normally do is complain about our cross, right? Nobody here, I know it's the other people who are listening to this, but nobody in this church ever complains about their cross. They complain about how much work I have to do, how much suffering I have to do, I have a sickness, I have a disease, I don't have enough money and we go around complaining about our crosses but, it's the cross which is the instrument of salvation in our own life.

After Paul says in Galatians, Chapter 6, Verse 14, he says, "I will boast about nothing except the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ for through it, I have been crucified to the world." So what we need to do, of course, is pick up our cross but you need to know this - you don't complain about the cross, even though we all do it. I do it too. I complain about how busy I am or different things. I get it. God's calling us, you know, again what do people say, "I want you to offer it up," and yet some people even offer up their crosses for themselves. Is that what the cross is about? We offer it up for others. Look, Christ went on the cross not for Himself but for us. When we get crosses, they are not for ourselves but for others. Do you get it?

So when you have a cross in your life you struggle with say, "Jesus, I offer up this pain, this suffering, my cross not for me but for my son who doesn't go to church, my daughter who doesn't care for you, this for the people who don't know you, Jesus. For this one who is suffering; for my friend who has cancer – Lord, I take this pain, I take this cross and I follow in Your footsteps which means I don't waste this suffering on myself. I do it for somebody else. That's how we boast in the cross of Christ.

So, today as we exalt in the cross of Jesus Christ, on this Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, we need to be grateful that He paid the price for me. We need to boast about Him in the way we live and what we have in our house and then we have got to live it by taking the cross that we all have, all the crosses that we have, and not wasting them on ourselves but accepting them and embracing them for the salvation of others.

You got it? You get it? You gonna do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.