

Homily by Abbot Cuthbert Johnson, OSB,

Among the many celebrations that occur during the course of the liturgical Year there are some for which one day does not suffice to dwell and reflect upon their mystery being celebrated. One such day is Good Friday, when we celebrate the redemptive death of Christ and contemplate His sacrifice, which brought about the salvation of the whole world.

On Good Friday we followed the Man of Sorrows who gave Himself up for us. Even though we recall that the Lord died for our salvation it was not appropriate on that day to dwell upon the triumphal aspect of Christ's suffering. And so today through the celebration of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross of Jesus, the Church would have us rejoice and glory in the Cross which is the instrument of the victory of Christ over sin and death.

Today, taking our inspiration from the words of Saint Paul, we dwell upon the victorious and joyful aspect of the work of redemption, we glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming that He is our salvation and that through Him we are saved and set free from sin.

We have been raised with Christ, and so we must seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. We must not be among those who have their "minds set on earthly things" because Saint Paul tells us that to have our minds set on earthly things is to live as "enemies of the cross of Christ".

If some Christians today have lost a little of their fervour and zeal and even their sense of direction, it is because they are not following and embracing the way of the Cross, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The Cross reminds us constantly that the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ is completely the opposite of worldly values:

Jesus did not tell us to seek after power, for he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and on the night he was betrayed, he gave us an example of the meaning of service when he washed the feet of his disciples.

Jesus did not tell us to affirm ourselves, but on the contrary to deny self and take up the cross.

He who had preached, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who revile you, gave us the ultimate proof of his teaching on the Cross. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

There were three crosses on Calvary and we have the words of all three of those condemned to die. One of the criminals cried out, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

As he dies he continues to protest, and like many who protest, he does not listen and so takes no notice of who Jesus really is.

And then we have the words of the other criminal who rebuked his companion, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

In the person of this repentant thief we have the image of whole of repentant humanity. The thief who would not accept Jesus cried out to be saved, to be taken down from the Cross. The repentant thief cried out not to be taken down but to be taken up into the kingdom.

And so our Lord's second word from the Cross was a response to prayer, Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." See the power of Christ's redeeming sacrifice, a dying man asks a dying man for eternal life, a man without anything to call his own asks another poor man for a kingdom. At the great moment of salvation, it was not an apostle who acknowledged Christ as Lord and Saviour but a sinner seeking forgiveness.

Between the crosses of the two thieves we have the Cross of Christ. The one who forgives and saves. The arms of Christ are stretched out towards the repentant and the unrepentant, so it was then and so it still is today.

If we are to be one with Christ, we must take up the Cross, and follow, not walk ahead or alongside but accept the Cross in whatever form it takes.

We must be prepared to accept the Cross, which we are given; no matter how painful it will never be harder or heavier than the crosses which we make for ourselves through our sinfulness and failure to trust in the Lord.

Today we recall the words of the Lord, "Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also".

Today, as we celebrate this great mystery of life through death, we accept to die with Christ for we know that if we have died with him we shall also rise with him to the glory of his kingdom. Amen.