

Sermon for the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

'And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people unto myself.'

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Unnumbered are the trees of the world, spreading their branches toward heaven, rooted deep into the earth; a glorious creation, uniting the heavens and the earth; drawing life from the divine light of the sun, drawing healing water from the soil of the ground. Almighty God has honored all trees, even giving to trees the honor of feeding our first parents, Adam and Eve; even giving to one tree in the garden the task of giving to our first parents eternal life.

Yet no tree is more honored than the tree of the cross. That most blessed and beautiful of all created things afforded to humanity.

Once, millennia ago, in fearful obedience to God, the tree of the cross allowed itself to be hewn down, and formed into the tool of torture for the Lord made flesh. No created thing, made by the King of Heaven, would will to bring suffering to its Creator; but for the sake of the salvation of mankind, the crown of creation, the tree obeyed; to be hewn into a cross.

Now this one tree takes innumerable forms, with infinite dignity. It adorns altars, gilds with gold and silver; gem and stone. It processes from before the altar to among the people, bearing the Son of Man. It sanctifies the homes of simple Christians in every possible shape, in every possible beauty. It stands tall upon the churches and steeples of every nation. It adorns the fields of simple farmers. It hangs in sacred metal around the necks of lowly believers.

And yet beneath these innumerable forms lies the one tree; the one cross. Beneath the gold and silver; the bronze, the lacquer, there is only one tree. See within the crucifix which is paraded into your midst, which dwells within the chancel, which hangs upon your wall, which binds your throat, which is tattooed

upon your body, which is drawn upon your breast in your baptism the one tree, the one cross.

For beneath the gold and silver and ink lies the passions of the One called wretched, lies the tree covered in the blood of the Son.

Behold that tree, and know its obedience to God.

For in ancient days, strong men, soldiers seized it, that it might be made a torment for their enemy. They tore it into pieces, that it might be forged together into the form of a cross, that it might bear our suffering.

And as it was made, there came to it Mankind's Master, with haste, for He had chosen His way, and Had chosen this tree, for He wished to be crucified upon it.

The blessed tree dared not bend or burst, for the Lord had willed this fate.

The Master stripped himself, a Hero, greatest of all men, that He might be *lifted up*, upon this tree.

That was God Almighty.

Strong and steady, He climbed the gallows of the tree, brave in the sight of the faithful, despised by all humanity, for He wished to release us.

The tree dared not bend or burst, but stood fast in the fear of God. And as it raised up the King of Creation, the Master of Heaven, it dared not bow down; the blessed tree, obedient to will of the Creator.

Into it were driven dark nails, born of malice, yet sanctified by sacred blood; so shall the tree receive them.

It was drenched from every wound and injury of the ever blessed Word; into its wood was soaked that blood shed from the side of the Son of Man.

It there witnessed the Lord of Hosts stretched upon it cruelly, as He released His Spirit to the world. Dark clouds cloaked with darkness the corpse, which, though in humiliation, shined with heavenly splendor.

All creation wept. They shrouded themselves in shame at the death of the King. Christ was on the Cross.

There it stood, the one tree, as men jeered and mocked the corpse of the King, until they became bored with their own hatred and wandered; a lone soldier remained, and spoke to the cross, *'This was the Son of God.'*

Then those who knew love came, and from it took the body of God Almighty, that He might be received into the earth, there to purify the trees, even the trees of knowledge.

There He rested for a while, the Son, after His conquest, as the tree was looked on. A few, only women, carried Him to His rest in lament. The cross looked on, weeping from afar.

But the King of Creation arose. All things did He conquer; all enemies did He destroy. And friends of the King; those of faith, came to this tree, and in many thousand forms, adorned it with gold and silver; gems and arts; for it was bidden to do baleful, cruel sorrows; the first to suffer for the sake of the Lord. So it is ever blessed.

Therefore, the time has come for men to honor the tree. Mankind from every land and nation shall bind to themselves the seal of this sign, for upon it, God's Child suffered.

The tree of the cross, mighty now, is raised up in every place, adorns every faithful body, consecrates every sacred house, for by it, Christ healed humanity. Therefore let all men stand in awe before it.

Long ago it was made to bear the hardest of all pain, to be made most loathed by humanity, that pastors might speak of the life it bore. Then, as eternal Mary, the everlasting Church of God, and its ministers speak the words of the Gospel, uncover in these words Glory's beam, the true tree of life, upon which Almighty God suffered for mankind's sins and Adam's iniquity of old.

Death God tasted there, upon the cross, but He arose in great might, to help men, that at the end of our fleeting life, we may be without fear.

For He Who was pierced, Who holds the throne of judgement, shall reckon all things on the last day; and many will be afraid, and know not what to say to Christ.

But there will be no need to fear for those who have had the sign of the Holy

Cross drawn upon their breast; who have received the tree of salvation in the washing of baptism.

For all who have received this cross within themselves, He, the Lord of Hosts, shall seek out, to make His own, to dwell with Him forever.

Therefore if ever we are asked for what reason we bow before the chancel; we face the cross as it processes, we hang the sacred sign upon our walls and necks and draw it into our bodies, let us say:

'My hope is set forth upon the cross, and I look there upon the Lord every day, that He may here, in this fleeting life, fetch me and bring me to where there is everlasting joy. The reality of heaven, where the Lord's people are seated in feasting. For there is single bliss.

'There, beneath the blessed tree, I will sit, that I might from then on dwell in glory, well with the holy, to partake of dreams, with Him who was nailed to the cross, my joy and consolation, my salvation and friend, with Him Who here on earth suffered on the gallows of the tree for mankind's sin. He unleashed me and gave me life, a heavenly home.

'Joy He has made new, with the wealth of His conquest, that those who endure the fire of this life be given bliss. For the Ruler has come, enthroned on the cross, Almighty God.'

'For' on that cross, 'the Lord has made known his salvation, he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Numbers 21:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 12:20-33.