

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – September 14, 2018 – Fr. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 6:30pm Mass & Penitential Vigil – 1,200 words

Thank you for gathering here this evening in prayer and penitence, at a particularly difficult time in the Church's history. With more bad news coming out each day we may often wonder how much worse it can get. We may also be in shock that things could have ever gotten to this point. It does not shock our Lord, however, whose Cross we honor and worship on this feast day. He foreknew each and every one of the awful and scandalous things that are now being revealed – and he offered his life for them also. He is deeply offended by them – but he is not shocked or surprised by them.

Our gathering takes place at the foot of the Cross; we stand there with our Blessed Mother and St. John, to offer our Lord some consolation for the suffering he bears for such wicked deeds. We see, in fact, how his suffering is prolonged through time, through history. It is good for us to extend our field of vision to the two thieves who are hanging, one on each side of our Lord, also. One of them repented, and many have piously thought that he did so because of our Blessed Mother's prayers. So we pray to obtain graces of repentance for those guilty of crimes and sins in the present scandal as well.

As we stand in that dramatic scene – the scene that is sacramentally made present on our altar at every Holy Mass – we contemplate our Lord's Precious Blood also, flowing down from his five wounds and many scourge marks. It is the Blood that saves the world; it is the price of our salvation. It holds infinite merit before God the Father. We join in offering that Precious Blood to the Father also, that he may cleanse and purify the Church, renewing her and making her white as snow. We especially ask that Christ's Blood may wash over all the victims of these scandals, healing their wounds and giving them a new sense of hope and of peace.

But as we stand in this dramatic scene we cannot fail to recall our own sins and how we must atone for them also. We have not – to use the language of the gospel – always walked in the light and as children of the light. The offertory antiphon for this Mass is a prayer we may all say with contrite hearts: “By the sign of the holy Cross, O Lord, protect your people from the wiles of all our enemies, that we may be able to offer you worthy service, and that our sacrifice may be pleasing in your sight”. We ask that a drop of his Precious Blood may fall upon us, also, and that we may be strengthened to walk more resolutely in God's light, as his faithful children.

Indeed, this is our calling – a calling that is renewed with greater urgency in a time like this: namely, to be saints. There have been many dark moments in the history of the Church, but what has always helped her to move beyond those episodes – besides our Lord's grace and invisible hand – is the merits of his saints. Many of us are angry at the failures and even malice of Bishops; at the crimes and sins of so many clergy; at the cover-ups; and so forth. But merely venting our anger will not fix a thing. Let us channel that energy into greater virtue, greater humility, greater holiness. And the path to holiness has been modeled by our Lord.

St. Paul explained that path to us in the epistle: “Brethren, have this mind among you, which was also in Christ...”; he humbled himself, made himself lowly, did not claim the glory that was rightly his. He tells us in the gospel that without him we can do nothing; in other words, we do not have a rightful claim on any glory in this life. But we do have a claim on humility, for our sins and weaknesses do humble us. And elsewhere in the gospel, our Lord bids us take up our crosses and follow after him. That means that he invites us to embrace the sufferings from which we cannot reasonably free ourselves, rather than shunning them.

The weight of these scandals is a form of suffering and it does not seem to be going away soon. It hurts us to see the Church that has nourished us – the true Church founded by our Lord and sanctified by his Blood – be blemished by the crimes and sins of men. It pains us to see so

many poor souls suffering because of those offenses – a suffering that is often unspeakable and for which healing is hard to find. We must offer our own share of this suffering to the Lord for the healing and purification of his Church. We must continue to pray. We must continue to do penance. We must pursue virtue and holiness. Let us ask our Lord to make us saints.

St. Helena is a great saint of this feast – the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine. She, at the turn of the fourth century, went to the Holy Land to look for the relics of the Passion. Analogously, we, too, can seek to pick up the pieces in the Church of today – looking for what is good, holy, noble, and virtuous, and striving to consolidate it and build it up. In this hour of darkness, we must not forget that great good is happening as well. There are many good bishops and priests, many fine young men are answering God’s call in the seminary; there are so many good lay initiatives, and countless works of charity. There is much goodness here tonight!

By rejecting evil and seeking the good, by associating ourselves with those who are good, and by persevering in prayer and penance, we will be part of the solution – the good ending to this terrible chapter of our Church’s history. Some of us will be led by God to help in other ways besides: I think especially of the good Catholic journalists who are doing yeomen’s work; of those who are participating in peaceful protests; of those who are writing letters to Bishops and calling for justice. But the solution starts at home, in our hearts, in our own walk with the Lord. It really begins at the foot of the Cross and in then carrying our own crosses.

May we resolve anew, then, to walk in the light and as children of the light – taking up our crosses and not fleeing from them, seeking humility, building virtue, doing the work of God, and supporting those others who do so. As we heard in the introit verse, “it behooves us to glory in the Cross of our Lord..., in whom is our salvation, life, and resurrection; by whom we are saved and set free”. May St. Helena, St. John, St. Dismas (the good thief), our Blessed Mother, and, in this special diocesan year, St. Joseph, guide us by their examples and prayers; and may, together, we be part of the great band of saints – the glory of the Church in every age.

Spanish Homily – 550 words

Doy una calurosa bienvenida a ustedes y las gracias por haber venido a participar en esta Misa y vigilia de oración y penitencia. Estamos viviendo en una temporada muy difícil de la historia de la Iglesia, tan alterada por escándolos; el Señor nos ha elegido para presenciar esta época. Es más, él nos llama a ser parte de la resolución, la cual siempre tiene que ver con la santidad. Nuestro Señor nos llama a ser santos. Vemos cómo, a lo largo de la historia, han sido los santos a impulsar adelante la Iglesia, especialmente en momentos oscuros y tiempos de escándolo. Señor, ¡ayúdanos a volvernos santos!

Esta fiesta de la Exaltación de la Santa Cruz toma sus orígenes de lo que, antaño, se llamaba la “invención” de la Santa Cruz – es decir, el hallazgo de la Cruz y de las reliquias de la Pasión de Cristo en Tierra Santa por parte de la madre del entonces emperador, Constantino. Su madre es Santa Helena y vivió a principios del cuarto siglo. Después de haber descubierto aquellas reliquias, ella las llevó a Roma, e hizo construir una imponente iglesia para hospedarlas. Ese gran templo permanece hoy y se llama la Basílica de la Santa Cruz.

Las escrituras nos dicen que nosotros somos templos de Dios – del Dios que mora en nuestros cuerpos y almas. Pero vemos cómo, al mismo tiempo, somos como templos de la Santa Cruz también. Porque la Cruz sí existe en nuestras vidas, en nuestros corazones. Participamos de tanto sufrimiento, sea espiritual o físico, y ese sufrimiento lo cargamos mientras seguimos al Señor. Podemos decir, de hecho, que los sufrimientos de Cristo se prolongan por toda la historia, y nosotros tomamos parte de ellos.

Pero podemos decir también que desde su Cruz Cristo previó todo lo que iba a pasar hasta el final del mundo. Siendo Dios, sabía todo por anticipado, y por ello, pudo ofrecer su vida por todo. Ese “todo” incluye los actuales escándolos – los delitos y pecados de algunos obispos, sacerdotes y otras personas en la Iglesia, que han traicionado al Señor y a su pueblo, y han hecho mucho daño. Todo le fue presente a Cristo mientras él colgaba en su Cruz. Su preciosa sangre fue derramada por estas cosas también.

Tal como la Virgen y San Juan acompañaron al Señor al pie de su Santa Cruz entonces, nosotros debemos acompañarlo ahora, en este momento duro de sufrimiento. Oremos por la Iglesia – ¡su Iglesia! – para que la purifique y sane. Oremos por los que hayan hecho cosas tan horribles – que realmente son delitos y pecados mortales. Oremos por las víctimas, que viven con heridas dolorosas. Oremos por el papa y los obispos, para que sepan dirigirnos a través de esta tormenta.

Y esforcémonos nuevamente por ser santos. Así el Señor nos llama en toda época, y es sólo al volvernos santos que podemos esperar a ir al cielo. Este mundo realmente es un valle de lágrimas, como solemos decir en nuestras oraciones tradicionales. Buscamos aquel mundo en el que no hay más sufrimiento, en el que hay pura y eterna alegría. Para llegar ahí, debemos cargar con nuestras cruces y acompañar a nuestro Señor Jesucristo en su sufrimiento, que continúa hasta el final del mundo. Gracias por venir esta tarde, y gracias por su fidelidad.