

Theme: "Christ transforms the cross as a symbol of triumph"

Text: John 12:20-33

May God fill you all with great hope and joy in your believing. Amen.

The message for this Palm Sunday is from St. John, chapter 12:20-33:

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, 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.

²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷ "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die." This is the Word of the Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, in every town or city that we go, we see crosses in different places. We see crosses at the top of church buildings, in cemeteries, or we have a cross in our necklaces. Without doubt, the cross is the universal symbol of the Christian Church. Why are there crosses everywhere, if the cross was used by the Roman Empire as a way of punishment? The symbols of other religions in the worlds are more attractive. For example: The Star of David, the Crescent of Islam, the lotus flower of Buddhism. But for Christianity it is a cross; an instrument of execution in Jesus' time. It is like wearing a tiny electric chair around our necks or a rope hanging on our necks.

Why the cross is a symbol of our faith? In order to find the answer we need to go to the cross itself. Its design could not be simpler and with a hidden message of love for those who believe. There is a horizontal piece of wood and there is a vertical piece of wood. The horizontal piece of wood shows how wide is God's love for us. The vertical one represents the holiness and righteousness of God, and it points to heaven our final rest. The cross is where God forgave mankind without ignoring His justice and Law.

Our Gospel's text says that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and He went there with the intention of fulfilling "everything that the prophets wrote about Him" (Luke 18:31). The city of Jerusalem was dominated by a large festival spirit, produced by thousands of pilgrims from all countries.

The Apostle Matthew records in his book that when Jesus entered into Jerusalem "Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." Mt.21:9-11

When the crowd saw Jesus they were filled with joy and happiness, except the Pharisees and teachers of the Law who were unhappy and looking for a way to arrest Jesus. No doubt they were waiting for a Messiah too, but they were waiting for another kind of Messiah. They were waiting for a Messiah who would defeat their enemies by force and not a Messiah who entered Jerusalem riding a donkey. They were waiting for a Messiah who would ride a strong horse followed by his strong army. But, my dear friends in Christ, a Messiah like that would not help us spiritually nor would give us eternal life.

Our text says that among the people who came to Jerusalem to the feast of Passover were Greeks. They came to Philip and asked him: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." These words are every church talk. People coming up to us and asking about Jesus! Why, sign them up for instruction classes, give them some brochures, introduce them to the pastor! It seems like all of our efforts are finally paying off. Word is getting around. The kingdom is growing!

Except when they tell Jesus, He does not seem so excited. He starts talking about death, and being troubled, and judgment. He talks about being crucified. And rather than give these curious Greek seekers an audience, Jesus in effect, says: "*They want to see me? They will see me. They are going to see me with everyone else, when I am lifted up from the earth on the cross. They are going to see me in humiliation, and weakness, and suffering, and pain. They are going to see me die.*" And you can almost imagine Andrew and Philip, thinking . . . "*Uh, I do not think that's what they had in mind!*"

What do we have in mind? What kind of Jesus are people today looking for? What kind of Jesus are we looking for? We are not told why these Greeks wanted to see Jesus, but if they are like us and folks in our world today, we can probably make some pretty good guesses. Perhaps they were looking for a Jesus to help them solve their problems. Or maybe they were looking for a Jesus to work a miracle for them. Or perhaps they wanted to *confront* Jesus, because they were disappointed in Him; He was not doing those things they thought He should be doing.

The truth is that we, and many people in our world today, are looking for a Jesus to meet *our* expectations, *our* ideas, and *our* opinions of what He should be doing. But Jesus will not be bound or conform to our wishes. He does not jump through the hoops we would like Him to, and do what we want Him to do, and be who we want Him to be. No, He came to go to the cross. He came to die on it. And all who want to see Him must see Him there. For apart from the cross He is not a Saviour. He may be a spectacle, a wonder, and someone people may be willing to wait in line to see – but apart from the cross, that's all He would be.

But He came to be much more than that. Jesus, then, says: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, 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." As you know the grain of wheat must fall on the ground, before it bear fruit. It would be foolish to store the grain in a container because it would produce nothing. Or to leave this grain of wheat left high upon a shelf, far above the earth below, it will remain by itself. There will be nothing coming forth from the soil no matter how well the ground has been prepared by the Law. So will there be no one springing forth from this earth unless God Himself comes to us ... unless the Word becomes flesh.

Just as the grain is placed into the ground and, as a result of this death, it brings forth a great harvest, so also the death and burial of the Savior will bring forth much fruit. Truly, the Hour of God is the time of His Life-giving death. It is finished for it was God's will that His Son be the perfect Sacrifice. "And by that we may be sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). The Hour of God is in the past in that Christ died

once for all. The One who was born from a virgin woman would die and would be buried in an unused tomb.

The Pharisees who rejected Him probably said, "This is the end of His mission." But the cross triumphed. Due to His death and resurrection He brings salvation to all who believes. He is the Saviour of the nations. He converts sinners and transforms their lives as happened to the thief to his right side of the cross. Jesus made that criminal a saint worthy of the paradise. In this manner we should also see Jesus. If we see Jesus only as someone to imitate, or we see Him as a martyr or we just see Him as an example to follow we are far away from the real Jesus. For those who think about Him in this way "the cross is folly for them".

But for those who sees Jesus as He is described by the prophets in the Old Testament the cross is God's power for salvation. By the death of Jesus, God is glorified. He is the representative of all men. He accomplished the Law. He is the One who suffered and died on the cross for us. And He Knew well the path He has to walk to rescue us from sin. He says to His Father of heaven, 'Father, save me from this hour?'" Then He says: "But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name."

My friends in Christ; if the cross is removed from the Christian Church this church is reduced to a bunch of moral rules. Such as the teaching of those pagan religions that exist in the world. Without the cross sinners; like you and I, cannot enter into communion with God. The cross is the means of reconciliation. It is where the love of God is manifested for mankind. The cross brings down the wall that separates man from God. Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

And that is the God we have been drawn to, and which we approach, and which we hold up for others – the One, the only One, who took our sin away. For He is our Saviour. Or as someone once said: "*Christ died – that's history; Christ died for us – that's Christianity; Christ died for me – that's salvation.*"

And to provide for our salvation, to save you and me and all people from sin and death and grave and Satan – that's what Jesus has come to do. That's why He wants to be seen – not just in *any* way – but lifted high on the cross; and that's why He rose again from the dead on the Third Day. "*For us and for our salvation.*" Amen

In the name of the Father, the Son + and Holy Spirit. Amen.