

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-bringing Cross. The immediate cause for this feast is the finding of the cross on which Christ had died, in the year 326 by the mother of Emperor Constantine, Helena. She had gone to Jerusalem to restore the holy places and to look for the cross on which Christ had died. A temple to Adonis was built over the tomb of Christ and a temple to Venus over the Nativity Cave in Bethlehem. They were demolished at her instructions and then churches were built there. After finding the cross, it was carried in procession through Jerusalem and lifted by the Bishop of Jerusalem, who blessed the four winds with the cross. In the same way we lift up the cross at the end of matins, as we did today. For us, this feast mainly refers to how the cross, which nevertheless represents a terrible death, can be joyful and life-giving. This is one of those seeming paradoxes that we are dealing with. The cross is called joyful and life-giving. We already had the mystery of the Trinity, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then the unknowable, unattainable God who becomes man and yet remains God, then the virgin who bears a child, and now a cross that is joyful and life-bringing. Most of us cannot comprehend that. How is that possible ? Life-bringing and joyful? Most of us are afraid of the cross!

The truth is that the cross takes place in this world, the resurrection in the other world. The cross takes place in my family , in my work , in my social life , in my feelings , and even and especially in the church, when things do not go the way we want them to go, in the choir , in the altar , between all of you among each other. There lies our cross. If we can recognize and accept that as our cross, then there is resurrection in heaven, then there is deep joy, because we experience that we are with God. If we can see that the things that we are dealing with and that we experience as a crucifixion, that those things are really given to us to approach the Kingdom of Heaven, then we are walking the Christian path. Then, we exchange our attachment to the earthly for the presence of God.

Look at Christ; Judas betrays Him, the Jews for whom he came crucify Him, He is falsely accused, His friends forsake Him. Hanging on the cross He is mocked ; And what is his comment: Lord, forgive them, they know not what they do. The more often you pray with all your heart , the more often you partake of the sacraments and the more often you really try to love your fellow man , the deeper and more sincere your Christian life becomes , the greater the chance that you will be betrayed, left behind, falsely accused, yes, crucified.

And be not afraid of the cross; it is given to us in the measure we can bear. We are not asked to die physically for God, as Christ did, but we are asked to accept the cross as it is given to us. We must recognize and embrace this phenomenon , the Cross . That is Christian life. Take up your cross and follow me, said Christ. The cross is unjust according to this world, but in reality it is our salvation. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And here justice does not mean that justice is

done to you according to the world, but that you are right with God. In accordance with God. Well, you may think, I am not that holy, yet people turn against me, yet I am treated unfairly. But if you can endure injustice, carry it like a cross and even welcome it, then that injustice becomes your path to humility and that is exactly what we need to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. The cross reflects and produces humility and is given to us to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. The cross, our cross is a true gift from God and that is why we call today's feast; the Feast of the Joyful and Life-bringing Cross.