

Holy Cross Day
John 12:20-33 (ESV)

Jesus said, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also."

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

A most blessed festival of the exaltation of the holy cross to all of you, dear ones. I rejoice to be here with you today and to relish with you this day appointed for us by the holy Church of God to ponder and meditate on the holy cross of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and what it means for us as Christians following after Him.

You heard the words of our Lord just moments ago and I would draw your attention to them still once more. In English, the text reads, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me." But I'm not sure this really captures the true force of the statement. In Greek, the text says more literally, "If anyone would serve me, let him follow me." This is more than merely a statement of fact. Our Lord Jesus here gives a command. If anyone would serve the Lord of Glory, the King of Kings, let that person follow Him; let the one who would serve Jesus follow in the way of Jesus. And where Jesus is, there will His servant be also.

And as I look out at each of you tonight, dear ones, I can't help but think you all know very well what that means and what it has meant for you as a Christian. For the way of Jesus, the theological path of Jesus, is anything but formless and void. It has a very specific form and character to it, and the same is true for all of us as His servants. For the way of Jesus is that of faith in God our Father and obedience to His will--it's the way of the cross. And as ironic and strange and even foolish as it may seem, the way of the cross is the way of life. What Christ our Lord thus tells us and shows us is that by dying in Him, we live.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but which, in the end, leads to death--to losing your life with no way of getting it back. This is the way of the world, of loving this worldly life, and the deceitful pleasures of sin that lead us away from God. This way is broad and easy. Consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The way of the rich man could not be more broad and easy. He feasted sumptuously every day. He was clothed in fine linen. He may well have enjoyed a great reputation in the community. He loved his life, but was without true fear, love, and trust in God, so he lost his life. And where did that path lead in the end, dear ones? Like a funnel going downward, that broad path on which he began led to the narrow confinement of hell, that waterless pit of anguish, from which there is no escape. He was hopelessly trapped and squeezed and isolated.

But think now on Lazarus. How narrow and confined and uncomfortable did his path start out? How confined and hellish did his life seem as he lay there languishing at the gate of the rich man but which then opened up to eternal life? Dear ones, this is because the path of Lazarus is the path of the cross. It's the path of clinging to God by faith and being obedient to His will no matter what may come, no matter what the circumstances may be--be they poverty and anguish,

be they ridicule, shame, and mockery--no matter. And do we not see Christ endure all of these things for us? Do we not see that in Christ's death on the cross is our life which we now live unto God?

For all of us, we who would be the servants of Jesus, the Lord of Glory, we must despise life in this world. We must despise its sinful pleasures and lusts, and all the alluring but fleeting pleasures it offers us and in this way, die to ourselves. For our path, our way, is the way of Jesus, it's the way of the cross, of following Him and sharing in the death He died. For if we share in a death like His, we'll also share in a resurrection like His.

This is the life of the baptized child of God that all of you have been brought into. It's a cruciform life. It's a life of faith and obedience to God lived under the cross of Christ. And by dying in Christ, we live.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever.