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**PASTORAL VISIT TO INDIA**

**13-15 SEPTEMBER 2015**

**HOLY MASS AT THE BASILICA OF**

***OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY*, BANDEL**

**ARCHDIOCESE OF CALCUTTA**

***HOMILY: Monday, 14 September 2015, time: 17.00***

*Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross*

Readings: 1st Reading: Philippians 2, 6-11

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 78

Gospel: John 3, 13-17

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this day, when we celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we honor the mystery of our redemption: Christ died out of love for us and by his death on the cross he brought Salvation to the world. The Cross of Christ is the instrument of love through which God saved us. The public veneration of the Cross of Christ originated in the fourth century, and shows that faith from the early centuries was accompanied by the people’s piety towards the Redeemer. The Cross, because of what it represents, became the most potent and universal symbol of the Christian faith. We adore this instrument by which Jesus Christ, Our Lord, sacrificed Himself.

From being an object of scorn and shame, the Cross has become the sign of love and glory. In fact, the adoration of the Cross is the adoration of Jesus Christ, and this instrument of torture and death became an instrument of life and grace. The Cross represents the one and unique sacrifice by which Jesus, obedient even unto death, accomplished our salvation. The Cross in itself summarizes the passion, the crucifixion, the death and resurrection of Christ. It reminds us, as Christians, of God’s act of love in Christ’s sacrifice, and as it is expressed in a very beautiful way by St. John: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life*” (Jn 3,16).

Through the torture of the Cross, Jesus turned the world’s way of thinking upside down, revolutionizing also the supreme action of those who exercise power and violence*.* For this reason, writing to the Galatians, St. Paul could say: God saved the world by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (cfr. Gal. 6, 14); and he reminded the Philippians that Christ “*became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Phil. 2, 8). We know that in Christian thought the «cross» means the afflictions, trials, and persecutions, which make us close to and part of the mystery of Christ. This is the sense in which our Lord uses the word, when he says, “*He who does not take up his cross, and follow after me daily, is not worthy of me*” (Mt. 10, 38).

The Cross of Christ is a sign of forgiveness and Jesus did this while hanging on the Cross: “*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*” (Lk 23, 34). Thus, we can understand Paul when tells the Galatians: “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Gal. 6, 14). He simply indicates: I will glory in nothing, but in Christ crucified: our joy and delight, comfort and peace, hope and confidence, foundation and resting-place, ark and refuge, food and medicine. The example Paul gives us, together with his perception of the mystery of the Cross of Christ, is fascinating. In his writings he did not consider his accomplishments or the extent of his suffering. He did not meditate on his own goodness or righteousness. He loved to think of what Christ had done; what Christ had suffered. In this he found glory and something to boast about.

On this day, when the liturgy celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Gospel reminds us of the meaning of this great mystery: “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that men might be saved*”(Jn. 3, 16). The Church invites us to proudly lift up this glorious Cross so that the world can see the full extent of the love of the Crucified one for all.

Now I would like to pass on to a more personal and subjective reflection, by asking some questions:what sense does the Cross have for me? Does the mystery of the Cross make sense for me? What sense is there in my celebrating the mystery of the Cross? Is it only a memory of a dramatic moment in the life of Jesus? Is it only a mystery that has to do with others but not with me? For example, consoling someone who is suffering as a result of an injustice, a severe physical ailment, a tragedy, or someone suffering moral anguish due to some vice or family crisis, like the drug addiction of a son, or because of a social injustice due to unemployment, lack of housing or money? I would like to mention something that touches each and every one of us.

When we begin to reflect in a more subjective and personal way, we must say: “What” is the Cross of Christ - an object that brings about death, or “Who” is the Cross of Christ - a personification of the Cross? Some mystics see the Cross as the second option, the Cross of Christ as a person: it is me. I am the Cross of Christ, which he silently takes upon his shoulders. I am that Cross, which for just a brief moment Christ seems to entrust to Simon the Cyrene, but which he immediately takes back upon his own shoulders, embracing me intensely and not wanting to part from me, a sinner. More than that, he wants to be nailed to me. Because for every sin the Cross is the death of Christ, it is also its forgiveness, the most profound embrace of Jesus: today you will be with me in Paradise, according to the promise given to the Good Thief!

In this perspective the sense of this liturgical celebration should not be considered for its historical or theological significance alone. The sense of this celebration is complete when we give it a personal meaning, or rather that the Cross of Christ is me and for that reason Christ loved and took me on his shoulders. Just as the Good Shepherd places the lost sheep on his shoulders so too I as the lost sheep am now found and feasted. In this way we understand more fully the meaning of mercy and why the Holy Father wanted to inaugurate the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which will begin in a few months. At the end of the day, the Gospel is quite simple. It is the same road that the Saints took, the same road followed by Mother Teresa. It is the road to conversion and returning to God. It is a road paved with humility and love, a road that touches the heart, a road of tenderness and beauty. In a word, it is the road of mercy.

Today’s liturgical celebration is the feast of the Merciful Love of God that is manifested in the Cross of the Lord.

Amen.