

THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE PRECIOUS & HOLY CROSS OF OUR LORD

TWO thousand years ago an axe was laid to a tree in Palestine. The bark was stripped off and lumber cut from it. What water had nourished and sun had fed was laid low, stripped, and divided into post, crossbeam, foot rest, and sign. Other trees around this time were felled and found their way into the able hands of the carpenter Joseph, who taught his boys, Jude and James, to fashion posts and lintels, purlins and joints, in order to erect homes. Yet, this tree was to be the final resting place of He Who fashioned sun and rain when making the universe: the home for all. This tree was to receive the nails that pierced the all-holy flesh of He who created flesh, nail, and tree. And upon this tree, He Who made all and took on corruptible flesh in order to participate in creation as one created, breathed His last.

Divinity cannot die. But, the human nature that the Divine assumed expired upon this Tree. Hell was giddy to devour the soul of He Who had cast out demons and expelled evil spirits and against Whom the Devil seemed to have no hold. Now, the Deceiver would take hold of Him. Yet, swallowing Him as the earth quaked and the sun darkened (So much so that a pagan astronomer in Heliopolis, Egypt 250 miles away—the future Bishop of Athens, St. Dionysius—groaned, “Either the Creator of all the world now suffers, or this visible world is coming to an end.”), Hell found this Morsel indigestible. This human soul was consubstantial with the Divinity. Rather than claim victory, the gates of Hell were trampled as the souls of the righteous from all time were led out of their exile by the One Who could not be resisted.

The tree had served its purpose. Drenched in vivifying blood that eventually dried and darkened into stains, pierced and splintered by the clumsy Roman nails, the Cross—the throne of the Lord of Hosts—was lowered, disassembled, and unceremoniously discarded into the refuse. While the followers of Christ huddled in fear in the Upper Chamber, our Lord Jesus Christ ascended His Celestial Throne; His earthly footstool, a sign of ignominy, lay forgotten in a heap...

...for three centuries. After the Edict of Toleration issued by St. Constantine (313 AD) in Milan, the 1700th anniversary of which we celebrate *this* year, St. Constantine’s (†337) mother, St. Helen (†330), led an effort to build now-legal Christian temples upon the site of Holy places in Jerusalem and Palestine. What led her there first, however, was her righteous desire to find the remnants of the Holy Tree upon which He Who hung the earth upon the waters was hung.

And she did! Beneath the rubble of a pagan temple to Venus, erected on Golgotha after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, it was found along with two others, the crosses of the two thieves crucified with Christ. What Christian has not kept alive the memory of the miraculous resurrection of the one whose body was touched to the Cross of our Lord at the command of Macarius, then Patriarch of Jerusalem? What Christian does not bow down before the Tree of Life, as those who beheld this miracle?

St. Helen stopped in Cyprus on her return from Jerusalem and founded a Christian community that would eventually become the still-active Monastery of the Holy Cross (*Stavrovuni*), leaving with them a piece of the Precious and Life-giving Cross. Let us join together this Thursday evening—Cypriot, Palestinian, American, & Egyptian—and sing with one voice that will resonate across the globe and throughout the universe: “Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection, we glorify!”

Fr. Daniel
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