



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday we are blessed to celebrate the Elevation of the Holy Cross. After St. Constantine legalized Christianity, his mother, the Empress St. Helen, made it her goal, not only to build churches over pagan temples, but also to seek out earthly relics of Christ, including the True Cross. By the time she arrived at Golgotha in the year 325, the former execution place was now a trash dump.

In all the waste, many would have felt overwhelmed and discouraged. However, guided by her steadfast faith, St. Helen continued to search, not with her senses, but with her heart. And with her heart, she saw and smelled a plant she did not recognize; the plant which we now know as Basil, because it belongs to our King. After careful excavation near the basil, three crosses were uncovered: one was the True Cross of Christ and the others were the crosses of the two thieves who were crucified with Him. To determine which of the crosses

the True Cross was, a sick woman was brought before all three. She venerated the first and the second, with neither bringing any change in her illness. But when she kissed the third, she was instantly made well. Similarly, when a funeral procession passed by the dead man was placed atop each of the crosses, and the True Cross of Christ raised him from the dead.

For many modern Christians, especially those who do not have Holy Tradition in their liturgical lives, the veneration of the Cross of Christ poses a stumbling block: how can an instrument of torture oppression be worthy of devotion? Even St. Paul recognized this when he wrote to the church at Corinth, “...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 23-24). Indeed, it is only when we consider that God turned all human logic upside down, that we begin to understand His intentions. Not only did He come to save humanity in the form of poor child, but instead of vanquishing His enemies with a vast army, he chose instead to end death by death.

By the Cross that we shall soon uplift and venerate, Christ demonstrates not only by words, but actions, that “*the Son of Man did not come to be served. But to serve...*” (Mark 10:45) For as He said, what greater love can there be than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends? And truly, through the course of His whole earthly life—even on the Cross we shall venerate—the Son of Man truly showed philanthropia, His Love of Humanity.

+SEVASTIANOS
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