

Sunday After the Exaltation of the Cross

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—One God.

Here we find ourselves again, with more restrictions to bear with. And perhaps it is fitting then that today is the Sunday After the Universal Exaltation of the Cross, that feast of which we celebrate every year on September 14th. Because today's Gospel reading is a powerful reminder of what it is as Christians we are called to do.

One of my favourite things about Canada is the National Parks system. And of all the National Parks I have camped, backpacked or hiked in across Canada, Riding Mountain National Park in Treaty 2 Territory is one of my favourites. But before you even get to the park, there is something interesting along the way.

After driving for a long time towards the park from Winnipeg, Manitoba, eventually, on your right side, you will see a big old barn, the red paint starting to fade and flake. In big white capital letters painted on the barn you can read a verse from the translation of the Bible known as the King James Version: "WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN, IF HE SHALL GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD, AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL? MARK 8:36".

Seeing this verse in big letters on some random barn on my way deep into nature is always a sight that has caused me to reflect. We must always strive to love the Creator more than we love His creation, and often this is no easy task. We get caught up in things. We allow the world to drag us along. And eventually, we find ourselves at a point in our own life where what we appear to believe, and how we appear to act, is no longer distinguishable from the world. Essentially we become Christians in name only.

It is at these times, at the moments when we reflect and realize our situation, that we need to turn back to Christ and remember what it is as Christians we are called to do. And we are told what that is in today's gospel reading: "The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me..." "

So what does it mean to take up our cross and follow Christ? The answer to this I feel is especially relevant given the new restrictions we are under. Blessed Augustine tells us,

“Turn, rather, to these teachings, my very dear friend: take up your cross and follow the Lord. For, when I noticed that you were being slowed down in your divine purpose by your preoccupation with domestic cares, I felt that you were being carried and dragged along by your cross rather than that you were carrying it. What else does the cross mean than the mortality of this flesh? This is our very own cross which the Lord commands us to carry that we may be as well armed as possible in following him. We suffer momentarily until death is swallowed up in victory. Then this cross itself will be crucified. The cross will be nailed to the fear of God. We would hardly be able to carry it now if it forever resisted us with free and unfettered limbs. There is no other way for you to follow the Lord except by carrying it, for how can you follow him if you are not his?”

I know these might be difficult words to hear, and often they are for me as well. But I have a friend who left for Mount Athos when he was a very young man, and he always reminds me of St . Paul’s words in the Epistle to the Philippians; my friend always reminds me that Christ was *obedient unto death*. So dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us shoulder our cross, and follow Him.

Αμήν.