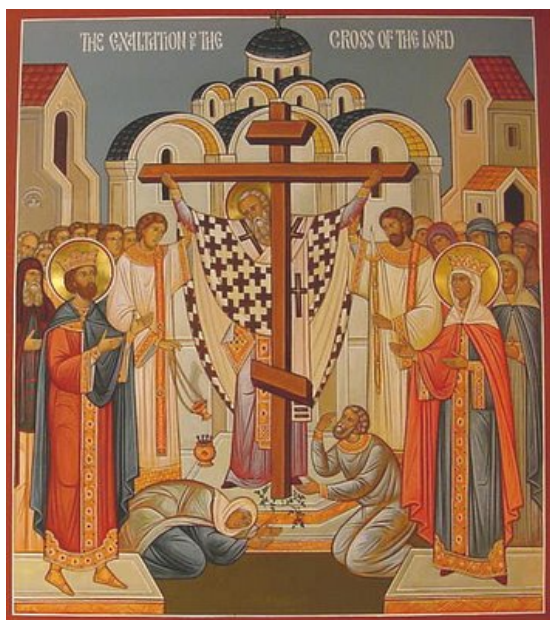

The Tree of Life



No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:13-17)

Anna was embracing the cross, holding it close. Tears were flowing as she confided her pain to the crucified. Married for ten years, she did not have children. Her womb was barren, like a tomb, unable to bring forth life. Yet, if this was the will of God for her, she decided to accept it.

The book of Genesis tells us that there were two trees in the Garden of Eden. One was the tree of life and the other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9). It is truly revealing that Adam did not pick up a fruit from the tree of life. Instead, he took the forbidden fruit from the tree of good and evil. He chose knowledge over life, even if that knowledge leads to destruction of life.

Saint John Paul II coined the phrase: the culture of death. Through abortion, wars, and euthanasia, we destroy life. The culture of death is symbolised

by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with a talking serpent crawling around and sowing the seeds of doubts in our hearts. We keep doubting God's presence, God's plan, and God's love. We decide to be in control. We want to be like God. And so, we establish our own laws regarding good and evil. Yet, the tree of life remains unnoticed. Nothing is said that Adam ate its fruits. We hear a lot about death, but the birth of life does not make headlines in our world.

After the sin of Adam, the Lord blocked the way to the tree of life. "He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3:24). That is our tragedy. Unable to notice its presence in the Garden of Eden, when we need it the most, we are unable

to get its fruits. Yet, only its fruits and leaves can nourish and heal us (Rev 22:2).

During the liturgy of the cross, we sing, “this is the wood of the cross, on which hung the Savior of the world”. The cross of Jesus is the live-giving tree. The death of Jesus removed the cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen 3:24). The cross connects heaven and earth. We have free access to God and to His grace (Gen 28:16-17). Life is again available to us. It reveals God’s marvelous presence in the midst of suffering and pain. It burns with love, which nothing can extinguish (Ex 3:2-5). It heals the bitterness of life making it sweet and healthy (Ex 15:25). The Cross of Jesus is not an ordinary tree. This tree, planted on our earth, renews everything bringing healing and life to people and nations.

I met Anna two weeks ago. She was with her husband and two lovely daughters were running around them. Their first child was born one year after that memorable prayer in which she embraced the cross and accepted the will of God in her life. “The cross of Jesus has transformed my barren womb into a spring of life”, she said.

The old tradition says that the Empress Helen found three crosses on Golgotha in 326 AD. In or-

der to determine, which one was the one on which Jesus was crucified, a sick woman was asked to kiss each of them. When, she kissed the true cross, she was instantly healed. It so happened that a funeral procession was passing that way. When the bereaved family heard about the miracle, they placed the body of the dead man on the same cross, and the dead man came to life. “The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14). The message of the Cross is the corner stone of our faith. “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), was the proclamation of the first Christians. The Apostle Peter says: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). On this day, we are all called to renew our faith. Let us pledge our faithfulness to the Crucified Lord of Glory by surrendering our lives to Him. Let us pray:

Dear Lord Jesus,

out of love for me, You died on the Cross. Out of love for You, I want to die to sin and live for You. Heal me, save me, bring me to life. Give me grace, so I can glorify You with my life and proclaim your love and mercy to the whole world. Amen.

Quote of the Week

“It is to the Cross that the Christian is challenged to follow his Master: no path of redemption can make a detour around it.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar)

Prayer Intentions

- Let us pray for Zhao and Chen family; may the blessing of God be always upon them;
- Let us pray for those who suffer in the world; may the message of the Cross be a consolation to them;
- Let us thank God for all the graces we have received in life; may our lives glorify His name;
- Let us pray for all who travel; may they, by the grace of God, safely reach their destinations;

May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.
New Life Asia Team