

## **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

### **Investiture of the EOHSJ**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

24 November 2018

Dear brother priests; Your Excellencies; and dear Knights and Ladies of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, together with members of your families and friends:

#### ***Introduction***

Once again it is good for us to gather in our Cathedral to celebrate this Mass of the Holy Cross during which we have witnessed two ladies, Ethelyn David and Natalie Mary Sonnen, and one knight, James Kent Donlevy, invested as members of the Order. They have joined their associates in a firm commitment not only to seek Christian perfection more intentionally but also to pray for peace and serve the struggling Church and peoples in the Holy Land.

The Order sponsors many needed charitable initiatives in the land of Christ's birth, most recently in addressing the challenge posed by the refugee crisis in the region, but also in fostering education and health care initiatives. These truly magnificent endeavours, however, are not the Order's primary purpose. Less than two weeks ago, Pope Francis, in speaking to the Consulta in Rome, reminded them that "the principal aim of your [the] Order resides in the spiritual growth of its members," and encouraged them to join their good works to "their own

indispensable relationship with the Lord Jesus, especially in prayer, in meditation on the Sacred Scriptures and in furthering their knowledge of the doctrine of the Church.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Call to Holiness*

We need to recall from time to time – and today is such an occasion – that the first and highest purpose of our Order is “to strengthen in its members the practice of Christian life;” that is, to grow in personal holiness. The good Lord “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence”<sup>2</sup> – which is a temptation for those who are free from grievous sin, yet are content with their life, while far from being on fire with the love of God.

Indeed, he addresses us personally with the words, “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16). Or, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3). The Second Vatican Council clearly stated this call to holiness in these words: “all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Address to the Consulta (12 November 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

“Each in his or her own way,” the Council said. What is important is that each of us discern the particular path and mission that the Lord has committed to me personally rather than hopelessly trying to imitate some model not meant for me.<sup>4</sup> Cardinal John Henry Newman phrased this beautifully when he wrote: “God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, everyone has a mission in life: “to be holy and blameless in the Lord’s sight (cf. Eph 1:4). A tall order for sure.

Yet, there is no need to be afraid of holiness. To be holy, or, if correctly understood, to “be a good person,” means becoming what the Father had in mind when he created you, being faithful to your deepest self.<sup>6</sup> “Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, ‘the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint’.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*, "Meditations on Christian Doctrine (7 March 1848).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 34.

To confuse a holy life with a spectacular one that shakes the world is a mistake. It is in doing the everyday things that make up our particular state in life, but doing them with love, that is our path to holiness. It grows through small gestures of kindness and humility, of generosity and purity of heart.

### *Prayer*

The path of our holiness passes through prayer and adoration. It is marked by a need for communion with God which goes far beyond a narrow and stifling concern with this world. We need, we absolutely need, to spend time in silence alone with God.

In this vein, the Holy Father places before us this examination of conscience:

Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord's presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness?<sup>8</sup>

In silence we can discern what the Lord is asking of us. Unless we

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<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 151.

listen to his words, we will be slaves of our own will and desires in what we do. “Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits and ways of seeing things. In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life”<sup>9</sup> – a holy life in obedience to God’s word which, like Mary, we have truly heard and put into practice.

### ***The Cross Lifted Up***

Lest I leave the false impression that holiness depends on the efforts of our own will, let me draw your attention to today’s celebration of the “exaltation” or “triumph” of the Holy Cross, whose insignia the members of the Order wear.

In the Gospel we heard of the lifting up from the earth of the Son of Man who from there draws all people to himself (cf. Jn 12:32). This is the supreme sign of God’s compassion for humanity. From the height of the Cross, Love comes down to us.<sup>10</sup> Truly, “The Cross is the most profound condescension of God to man . . . The Cross is like a touch of eternal love upon the most painful wounds of man’s existence.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 172.

<sup>10</sup> St. John Paul II, Homily in Halifax (14 September 1984).

<sup>11</sup> St. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 8.

Out of love, out of a desire to free us from eternal death, the Son of God stripped or “emptied himself” of his divine glory, immersing himself without reserve in our weak human condition with its attendant suffering and even death itself (cf. Phil 2:7-8).

Jesus Christ truly became “God-with-us,” not a god satisfied with looking down kindly upon creation from the throne of his glory. Rather, the Son plunged in person into human history, becoming “flesh” (cf. Jn 1:14). He embodied divine mercy to the fullest extent possible, beginning with the condescension of the Incarnation and ending with his Death on the Cross.

Why this path, this itinerary? we might ask. The answer is found in Jesus’ own words in John’s Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

The five wounds on your insignia have a twofold meaning. They represent, of course, the wounds of Christ which he carries even in his risen glory, but also the wounds that we bear. Christ is the one who transforms them by taking our wounds to himself to heal them. Grace alone can do this, and that grace is made possible by his Death and Resurrection.

It is this, the Paschal Mystery, which sets us free. Our holiness comes from him as a free and gracious gift, won at the cost of the

shedding of his Blood. The Crucifixion is the ultimate proof of a sacrificial and limitless love. In truth, as St. Paul wrote, “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). On the crossbeams, Jesus fully revealed the love of God for us.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Let us pray that Mary, Queen of Palestine, who stood courageously under that Cross as he was lifted high above the earth, will guide us in the way of holiness which the Lord’s Death and Resurrection has opened for us.

Every Holy Mass is a memorial of the exaltation of the Holy Cross, a making present of that act of infinite love by which the Son of God saved humankind and the world from the ravages of sin and death.<sup>13</sup> We now celebrate that Love raised up for us on Calvary. He nourishes us with his Body and Blood and so enables us to live our mission of holiness as members and friends of the Equestrian Order of the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Meditation on the Twelfth Station of the *Via Crucis* at the Roman Colosseum (25 March 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (11 September 2005).