



My Beloved Ones,

Today marks the very solemn occasion of the 19th anniversary of the events of 9/11. Most need no reminder of this tragedy; but as the years pass, there is a generation of young people for whom this date is a historical event.

On Monday, we observe another occasion, but one of hope and triumph: The Exaltation of the Holy Cross. After St. Constantine legalized Christianity, his blessed mother, St. Helen, made it her goal to find the earthly relics of Christ, including the True Cross. Arriving at Golgotha in the year 325, she found the former execution place now a site for trash. In all the destruction, many would have felt overwhelmed and discouraged; emotions which I am sure those who remember the site of Ground Zero understand.

However, just as so many of the courageous first responders risked their health to help recover and rebuild after 9/11, so too did St. Helen search with her senses, and her heart. Soon, she saw and smelled the kingly plant known as Basil, and three crosses were uncovered. A sick woman was brought before the True Cross of Christ and the crosses of the two thieves. She venerated the first and the second, with no change; but when she kissed the third, she was instantly healed. Similarly, when a funeral procession passed by, the True Cross of Christ was able to raise the man from the dead.

For many, the veneration of the Cross of Christ poses a question: how can an instrument of death be worthy of devotion? St. Paul recognized this when he wrote “...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 understand that God turned human reasoning upside down, that we begin to understand His mission: He who came into the world as a poor child, chose to end death—not with a legion of angels—but instead by His own death.

The reality of sin and evil was perhaps never clearer than on a day like 9/11. Almost two decades later, we solemnly remember the fear and sadness that day inspired. We also remember, though, the sense of hope and brotherly love that came in the days, weeks, months that followed; especially when we think of how New York City rebuilt in tribute, including our Archdiocese’s own contribution, the blessed St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox National Shrine. As we commemorate the passing of another anniversary, praying for the souls of the victims and their families, may we seek to find comfort in the shade of Christ’s Cross, remembering that after the Crucifixion came our Lord’s glorious Resurrection, promising the ultimate victory of light over darkness, life over death, proving, once and for all, “*the power of God and the wisdom of God.*”

+ALEXIOS
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