

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)

Today’s feast, dear faithful, has two meanings. First, it is a historical fact accepted by all historians, by mankind and even more - by all Christians as valid. Secondly, the Holy Cross brings salvation and has the life-giving power. As many of you know, the Persian King Khosrov wanted to invade Jerusalem, and, in 614 A. D., with a large army he enters the Holy City. Many people are killed and many are imprisoned. The Persians take the Holy Cross with them. This event shook the whole Christian world. The Byzantine army led by the King Herakles fight against the Persians to return the Holy Cross. Glory, glory in the highest to Jerusalem! Praise be to our fathers, the Armenian army regiment, led by Mzhezh Gnounie, supported the army, fighting to return the Holy Cross. Praise be to us and our nation, our fathers made a contribution to this God-pleasing deed. After the Persians were defeated and the Holy Cross was freed, it was solemnly brought to the Armenian town Karin, from where it was carried to Constantinople, and then - to Jerusalem. On the way the Holy Cross was raised for the people to see and worship.

What does the cross mean to us? The cross is the most important symbol of Christianity, dear faithful. What was the significance of the cross before Jesus? And what is the significance of the cross after Jesus? As you know the cross was a tool of disgraceful death in the Roman Empire. It was the most brutal execution method, to which the worst criminals were nailed. And so Our Lord for the sake of love for his flock willingly went to the cross. But, lo and behold, after the crucifixion of Jesus the cross changed its meaning. It is a miracle and historical truth. Before Jesus the worst criminals were sentenced to shameful death on the cross, the crucified victim often suffered for a week, slowly dying from blood loss. Thus, this instrument of shame and death through Christ became the instrument of salvation, this instrument of shame and death - the Wooden Cross - through Christ became the key to the gates of heaven.

The life-giving cross contains the image of the Lord's suffering, crucifixion, and, finally, the glorious resurrection. Jesus himself taught us, how a real Christian should bear and perceive the Holy Cross. "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." To take up your cross and follow Jesus are not just words or philosophy, dear faithful. To take up your cross and follow Jesus it is a way of life, it is a lifestyle. To follow Jesus it means to deny yourself, to sacrifice your material possessions. There is no Christianity without sacrifice, without depriving yourself and without bothering yourself. I want you all to remember that one cannot be called a Christian without making a sacrifice. Sacrifice means giving whatever you have, giving the thing you think is precious and what the other person needs. But especially, when this sacrifice is offered for the glory of God; this is a true sacrifice, dear faithful, when you reach into your pocket, touch your own belongings to help others for the glory of God. To say it with one word, I call it love. Sacrifice is the true measure of love. Those who love with all their hearts can make a lot of sacrifices. Those who are deprived of love do not understand true sacrifice. Strong love involves sacrificing a lot, because one loves his fellow and does it for the glory of God. Giving does not make us poorer, but on the contrary - it makes us richer; and as a great Western Armenian poet once said: "What has stayed with me in life is what I have given others, it is strange, but only this… " This is the way Jesus Christ Our Lord and all the saints lived. And now, dear faithful, we are expected to do the same. And today we are in this world, and God wants us to choose to live in the same spirit as Jesus, the blessed ones and the Apostles lived.

The cross is not an ordinary piece of jewelry or an ordinary symbol. We should approach the cross with reverence, veneration, fear and respect. For Our Lord, Our Creator, true source of all benefits and blessings, died on the cross for our sins. This is why we should treat the cross with special reverence and respect and not as an ordinary piece of jewelry. The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians wrote: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human

likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2: 5- 11)

Beloved, Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and died. He gave His life as a ransom for us, for you and for me, while He had no sin. Jesus came to atone for our sins and willingly went onto the Cross. The death on the Cross, Christ's redemptive death, which brought salvation, resurrection and eternal life after death, is the core of teachings of Jesus. Do we feel the same and do we perceive the Holy Cross that way today? Two of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, St. Peter and St. Andrew showed there reverence and respect for the Cross, which is very instructive, and we should follow their example. Thank God, today no one makes demands of us to be crucified and to shed our blood. Prior to his execution the Apostle Peter expressed his last will. Because of his special reverence and respect for the Holy Cross he was crucified upside down at his own request, since he saw himself unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus. The same applies to the Apostle Andrew. Because St. Andrew deemed himself unworthy to be crucified on the same type of cross on which Christ had been crucified, he asked to be tied to a Crux decussata or an X shaped cross. This is true attitude toward the Holy Cross, in everyday life we must also feel this special reverence and respect for the Cross, the holy, life-giving cross. The honorable Lord's Cross is means of salvation, because it is a sign of God's suffering and triumph. Jesus Christ died on the cross, but after resurrection He inflicted a death blow on Satan, on evil, dear faithful, through which death came into the world. Jesus Christ through His death brought immortality into the world, He destroyed and hit a death blow on evil, gave us one more chance to be counted worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven and eternity.

Unfortunately, for many people in today's world the life-giving cross has lost much of its original meaning, and, alas, for majority of the people it is a piece of jewelry. The Cross, dear faithful, is a symbol of hope: never be afraid to take up your Cross and follow Jesus Christ. This is the message from God, and never be afraid to follow Him, for what today is a cross and suffering, may become a blessing tomorrow, what today is a cross and suffering, may become eternity tomorrow, what today is a cross and suffering, may become the resurrection tomorrow, dear faithful. Therefore, never be afraid to take up your Cross and follow Jesus Christ. Today we pray that the Lord's Cross keep you safe. Let it become a shield for our nation and the soldiers, who are defending Artsakh's and Armenia's borders in particular. Please remember our soldiers in your prayers. Forever and ever. Amen.

Cathedral of Saint George

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