



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Good Friday

The Holy Cross

Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Ps 30, Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9, John 18:1-19:42

On the Lateran Hill, just along from the great papal basilica of St. John, stands the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. Founded in the fourth century by St. Helena in the Sessorian Palace, it was originally her private chapel to house some of the most important relics that she brought back from her trip to the Holy Land. Among them are wood from the true Cross, part of a nail and the legend Pilate placed on the Cross.

Invisible now but critical to the title of the Church was the fact that St. Helena chose to bring back, as foundation for the altar, barrow-loads of earth from the site of the Calvary. It echoes the story of the pagan Naaman the Syrian, 2 Kings Chapter 5, healed by Elisha, converted to the one true God, who takes a donkey-load of Israel's soil back with him so that he can worship, in the midst of the pagan empire of Syria, God Almighty and he can do it on holy ground. St. Helena brings Jerusalem to the heart of the pagan empire.

It is no accident for her son, Constantine, has just ended the long night of persecution of the Church by converting to Christ and pronouncing

the triumph of the Faith wherever Rome holds sway. It must have been an extraordinary time to be alive.

Today, seventeen centuries later, we meet at the foot of the Cross again on this Friday we dare to call good. Countless empires have come and gone in the years in between, including our own. The Faith remains though our lifetime has seen its wholesale abandonment by our own continent and the growth of massive persecution against the faithful by atheistic, Islamist and secularising regimes.

However dark or however glorious the times in which God has created us to live and to witness to Him, one thing remains central and that is the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Cross is the terrible mystery at the heart of our Faith. Like St. Peter, after Caesarea Philippi, we want to say, 'Lord this must not happen to you.' But, like St. Peter, we know now that this is the place where God has taken on the sin and death of Man and has overturned them and rescued us from eternal darkness and alienation. There are times when we want to walk away from carrying the Cross and Christ stops, as legend tells us He confronted Peter, fleeing persecution and martyrdom.

'Quo vadis?' Where are you going Lord?, asks Peter. 'I am going to Rome to be crucified again.', replies Jesus. Peter turns around and picks up the Cross and his destiny and that of the Church throughout time. We know that, if we are to follow Jesus, we have to walk the Way of the Cross. We know that where the Church is at the foot of the Cross, there she is being made ready for her Master's business. We know that

where the Church is bearing the wounds of Christ from that tree of persecution and death, there she is at her most powerful in bringing men to God. We know that the reconciliation and restoration of fallen Man is here. We know that here begins the end of the exile from Eden. We understand, however dimly, that this brutal wooden crossroads is the turning point of history.

We know this tree of death, stained with the blood of God's Son, is the Tree of Life that stands in the heart of Paradise. It would be the supreme folly of Man to ignore it twice. We know that the high road to Heaven passes through the Calvary.

In the years to come our new Holy Father's task will, again and again, to lead the Church of Christ back to the Cross of Jesus. There are no shortcuts to salvation, no detours around Golgotha. In Mass, in Mission, in Ministry, that is where it all begins. He must lead. We will follow.

So that, whether empires rise or fall, the Holy Cross in Jerusalem will be the constant focus of our faith and the foundation of the altar of our heart.

Saint Helena.....pray for us.

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