

SERMON
On the Gospel Reading of the Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
(Mk. 8:34-9:1)
(20 September 2026)

In today's particularly brief Gospel reading, Christ teaches us what we might call the "ethos of the Cross," or, more accurately, the "crucified and resurrectional ethos." This is not simply a moral teaching, a code of conduct characterised primarily by the virtues of patience and endurance in the face of life's trials and difficulties. For when we speak of the Cross, this is usually what we understand: that we should face with perseverance and without resentment whatever suffering may come into our lives, in whatever form it may take.

Certainly, all of the above is correct, but Christ is speaking about something much deeper. He refers to an entirely different and new way of existence, characterised by two conditions that the Lord places on an equal footing, since one cannot exist without the other—or, better yet, one has no meaning without the other. These two conditions are the denial of ourselves and the taking up of the Cross. Without these two pillars, no one can be a follower of the Lord and gain his soul, that is, eternity.

To deny oneself obviously does not mean denying one's nature, one's body, or one's existence as a person. For we often think that a Christian must live as though he were only spirit and not a human being with a body and a rational soul. To deny oneself means what the Apostle Paul explains when he says: "having put off the old man with his deeds and having put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator" (Col. 3:9–10). In other words, cast off from yourselves, like an old and worn-out garment, your old self—the person of corruption and death—and put on the new, renewed human being, whose model and archetype is the risen Christ. And on the other hand, as has already been said, taking up the Cross is not simply enduring the misfortunes that befall us, but willingly participating in Christ's way of existence: renouncing our own will, self-justification, egocentrism, and the demand that we live for ourselves. In other words, the Cross is not merely something that happens to me, but primarily a way in which I choose to exist: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

And how will this happen? I believe that even the words used by the Apostle leave no room for us to think otherwise. The casting off of the old self and the putting on of the new takes place through Holy Baptism, which is participation in the Lord's death on the Cross, as the divine Apostle again points out: "As many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death; therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also be united with Him in His resurrection" (Rom. 6:3–5).

Through Holy Baptism, a person casts off the old human being and is born into a new way of existence, a “crucified and resurrectional” way of life. It is not accidental, after all, that at our Baptism the priest gives us the precious Cross and places it around our neck, to remind us that the Cross is inseparable from our existence. And it should be noted here that a Christian cannot be conceived of without bearing the precious Cross upon their chest, through which we confess our faith in Christ. We should not feel ashamed or embarrassed to wear the Cross and to make the sign of the Cross upon our bodies whenever the occasion arises.

Through Holy Baptism, a person enters into what the Lord calls “the kingdom of God come with power,” that is, into our Holy Church. A person is saved because they are a member of the Church, my beloved brothers and sisters; they are not saved because they are righteous or moral. It is the Body and Blood of the Lord that cleanse us from our sins when we approach with contrition and an awareness of our sinfulness—not some supposed virtue of our own. Through the Holy Mysteries, we receive the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins, not through our good behaviour. And thus we are transformed into people who live according to a crucified and resurrectional ethos. Amen!