

# ***The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Change***

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian  
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX  
September 11, 2016  
Gospel Reading: John 3:13-21*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today in the Armenian Church calendar, we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It is on this day we remember and celebrate the consecration of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, back in AD 335. According to eyewitness accounts, during the ceremony, the patriarch took the relics of the Holy Cross and lifted them up (exalted them) so that the faithful could see the cross.

The cross has become a symbol of healing, freedom, and life, but is also a symbol of change. It reminds us that there is change in our lives, especially in the life of a Christian. The cross changes a Christian's life, whether we like it or not. Christ reminds us of this fact when He tells us, *"If anyone wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me"* (Matthew 16:24).

But what must we change in our lives? The answer is our hearts. If we want to know God, we must change our hearts and find Him there. So many people look elsewhere for God, in books, drugs, the internet, friends, hobbies and vices, but if we want to find God, we must look in our hearts.

There once was a man who went to a monk and said to the monk, "Father, I only want to serve and love God; show me the path to God". The monk asked, "Have you ever loved someone"? The man answered, "I am not a man of this world. I want to only serve God and love Him". The monk asked again, "Yes, but have you ever loved someone; a woman, a child, a friend"? The man responded, "I have already told you, I have renounced everything and do not interact with people. I am a religious and have nothing to do with worldly things. I love no one. Just show me the path to God". Laughing and crying, the monk says, "What you ask is impossible to answer. In order to love God, you must first change your heart and love your brother and sister. That is the first step to loving and serving God".

Today is also the fifteenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC, back on September 11, 2001. Everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news about the attacks. The world changed

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that day. Many will agree that after the attacks, and even until today, there is more hatred, greed and violence in the world today. But the question we must ask is: have we allowed the world that has changed also change our hearts? Have we changed with the world around us or have we remained Christians?

It is vital that our hearts do not change when the world changes. We are reminded of this every time we make the sign of the cross. We make the sign of the cross by taking our thumb, pointer-finger and middle-finger of our right hand and put them together, representing the Holy Trinity: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our ring-finger and pinkie finger remain in our palms, representing Christ's humanity and divinity.

We begin with our forehead, because the Father remains in heaven. We then bring our hand down to our stomachs, reminding us that Christ became man and descended from the Father to earth. It also reminds us that He enter our body and resides in our stomachs through Holy Communion. Then we place our hand on our left shoulder and then our right shoulder, symbolizing how through Christ's incarnation, death, burial and resurrection, humanity has been brought from the left hand of God (condemned side) to His right side (the side of the righteous). We then conclude this prayer and confession of faith with placing our hand, open-palmed, on our heart, saying "Amen". This reminds us every time that our heart must change and remain dedicated to God. If we do not recognize this, then we have merely become robots, going through motions.

So as we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and we remember September 11<sup>th</sup>, let us remember that we must change. We must change our minds, bodies and souls in order to change the world around us. As Christians, we must not allow the world to change us, but for us to change the world.

Amen.