Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross - Fr. Herman Homily September 13, 2026

Glory to Jesus Christ. >> Glory forever.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John is found in the third chapter verses 13 through 17 at the very beginning of the book of John. And today's reading is proclaimed as the church prepares to celebrate the exaltation of the precious and life-giving cross. Before the cross is lifted up before our eyes, very soon the evangelist John tells us why the Son of man must be lifted up. The passage begins with the Son who descends from heaven and ends with the world being offered life through him. Between these two points stands the central declaration of the passage. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up. The cross is therefore not presented as an accident, a defeat or the interruption of Jesus mission. It belongs to the mission itself. Today we will follow three movements in this Gospel text. **First**, the Son of man descends from heaven with authority. **Second**, the Son of Man must be lifted up so that those who are perishing may live. **Third**, God sends his Son so that the world might be saved through him.

The Son of Man descends from heaven. Jesus begins, "No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." John establishes immediately here where the authority of Jesus comes from. In the Torah, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and then descends bearing the word given to Israel. But here the order is reversed. Jesus does not ascend into heaven to obtain the Word. He is the one who descended from heaven. Moses ascended and descended. The Son descends and then is lifted up. This distinction governs the passage. Moses received the Commandment and delivered it to Israel so that the people might live according to the teaching of God and His Word. But Jesus speaks as the one who has come from above. His authority does not arise from human learning, human institutions or human approval. He speaks what comes from the Father.

We do not establish the truth of the Gospel by our own wisdom, by our own institutions. nor do we ascend toward God until we discover him. We don't look for him and find him. **The movement begins with God and God alone**. He is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. The Son descends. The Word comes to us. Our place is to hear the one whom the father has sent to us. The question is therefore not whether the Word of Jesus agrees with what we already think. The question is whether we hear the One who has descended from heaven. **The source matters** and the source is not us. And the Son who descended tells us where his mission is leading. He will not ascend a mountain like Moses. He will be lifted up before the whole world. The Son of Man must be lifted up.

Jesus says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." He takes us back to Israel in the wilderness. In that Old Testament text (Number 21:8-9) you ought to be reading, the people had rebelled. The serpents had entered the camp and the people were dying. God commanded Moses to lift up the bronze serpent and those who looked upon it lived. Jesus now applies that wilderness event to himself. The crucial word is είναι (eínai). One word in Greek and it means it is necessary. It must be. It must come to pass. He must be lifted up. The cross is not an accident or the failure of Jesus mission. It is where his obedience leads. In John, the lifting up of the of Jesus upon the cross is the manifestation of the Son to the entire world. **Notice the crucifixion was public**. It was a sign and flashed on and off with divine light. It was meant to catch people's attention. And John immediately gives its purpose that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. The pattern of the wilderness remains. The people are dying and God provides the means of life. Moses lifted up the serpent before Israel. Now the Son of Man must be lifted up before the world.

The cross confronts us with the choice between death and life. We cannot rescue ourselves. Life is given to the one whom God has lifted up. To believe in the Son is therefore not merely to acknowledge that the cross happened, that the crucifixion took place so many years ago, but to trust the Word of the One who was obedient to the Father even unto death. And wearing the cross on your breast is not enough. Nor making the sign of the cross with your right hand. No, that is not enough. Jesus now widens the picture. He says, "The serpent was lifted up before Israel, but the Son of man is lifted up for the κόσμος (kósmos)." That is the entire world. God gives his Son so that the world might be saved, might have life in him. J ohn continues, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." The movement has expanded from Israel to the world itself. The Son is given for the world all peoples Jew and Gentile. John defines this love by an action. He έδωσε (édose) gave God loved the world by giving his Son. And John immediately tells us the purpose. For God sent the Son into the world. Not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

The purpose of the coming and the being sent is not destruction, but life. Yet John does not turn this into a promise detached from the response of the hearer. It's not automatic. The life offered through the Son must be received. This is why John repeats the words, the one who is believing. And it is an active participle and it matters. It's not a one-time ascent to something that happened in the past. It's the one who practices the submission of belief. It's in the grammar of the language, folks. To **believe** means to receive the Word of the One whom the Father has sent and to live under that Word. **God's love** of course is not presented as merely a feeling that he had. It **is an action**. God gave his Son and our response must likewise be more than a feeling. We are called to hear the Son, trust his Word, and obey the One whom the Father has sent. The passage therefore moves in one direction from heaven to the world from the wilderness to the cross and from

death to life.

In today's Gospel we have briefly noticed three meanings. The Son of man descends from heaven with the authority of the father. He must be lifted up so that those who are perishing may be saved and have life. And God gave his Son so that the world might be saved through him, the crucified one. Moses ascended the mountain and descended, bearing the word for Israel. The Son descends from heaven and is lifted upon the cross. Moses lifted up the serpent so that the dying Israelites might live and God lifts up his Son so that the world might not perish but have eternal life. Therefore, as the church prepares to lift up the cross before our eyes, John tells us what we are looking at. The Son who descended from heaven. The Son who must be lifted up and the Son whom God gave so that the world might live. And remember the cross demands that we hear the One who hangs upon it. Trust the Word. He has brought us from the Father and obey the One through whom God offered life to the world. For truly God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. >> Amen.
Christ is among us. >> He is an ever shall be.

Help us. Save us. Have mercy upon us and keep us, oh God, by thy grace

Link to Sermon - https://youtu.be/85x0SmFpMKo?t=5141