

Inaugural sermon of His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the Head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, during the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of Enthronement

(March 27, 2011 in the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Kyiv)

*Your Beatitudes, Eminences, Excellencies,
Most Reverend Hierarchs, members of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC,
Beloved brethren clergy, venerable monks and nuns,
Honorable representatives of the Ukrainian government and diplomatic corps,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!*

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

“To Your cross, O Master, we bow in veneration, and we glorify Your holy Resurrection!”

With these words today, Christ's Church glorifies the Precious and Life-giving Cross. Today, as we pass the halfway point of our Lenten journey, the Life-bearing Tree is given to us that we might find in it a source of strength and courage to go on to the Resurrection, to put the Sign of the Cross at the center of our lives.

In his Epistle to the Philippians, St Paul has left us a unique early Christian hymn that a young Church, newly enlivened by the Holy Spirit, solemnly sang in its Liturgy. The Apostle of Nations calls to us this way:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:6-11).

In these words, the words about the Cross are central. Here, on the one hand, we see an icon of the earthly life of Jesus Christ – his everyday humanity en route to his death on the cross. The Cross is the greatest moment of his humiliation, extreme humility and divine self-giving. In the second part of this hymn, however, we see Christ, who is glorified by the Father Himself. It is from the death on the Cross that begins the Resurrection, the glorification and triumphant revelation of His divine glory, which is the glory of the Father.

Every Christian who follows his Lord as a disciple of Christ must witness in his personal life the effectiveness of His paschal mystery. One can enter into the celestial glory of the Resurrection through its only door – through His Precious and Life-giving Cross. Our vocation is to follow the Savior to the end, possibly even until the death on the Cross. The mystery of His Life-giving Cross lies in that while this is the lowest degree of humility, defamation and disgrace, it is exactly the place from which the Father proceeds to raise and glorify us in His divine glory, before which every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

“To Your cross, O Master, we bow in veneration, and we glorify Your holy Resurrection!”

These words come as a special sound to us today! For us – the Church-martyr, which as the loyal inheritor of the faith of the Apostles – sings them in this Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection! Is this not an eloquent sign of God for all of us, who on this day – while venerating the Precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord, do so in the Cathedral of the Resurrection?

Our Church in the 20th century has followed her Savior to the end – until the total destruction, and seeming death, on her native land. However, this death of hundreds of thousands of our laity, priests, monks and nuns, led by our episcopate, was death on a cross, and therefore life-giving! Our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents thus made known to us, their descendants, and through us – to a free Ukraine – the strength and invincibility of the Precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord. In its defamation, humiliation and denigration, our Church has come to this place: the place of resurrection, where the Heavenly Father glorifies her raised up in His incorruptible glory, before which every knee will bow and every tongue will confess – through the power of this Church's testimony in the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"To Your cross, O Master, we bow in veneration, and we glorify Your holy Resurrection!"

For me, a young Father and Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, these words are a summary of her past, a sense of the present and a guidepost for the future.

Today, we – the heirs of Volodymyr's Baptism – feel the unity and continuity with our history and tradition, receiving the precious heritage of our great predecessors: the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrey (Sheptytsky), Patriarchs Josyf (Slipyj), Myroslav Ivan (Lubachivsky) and Lubomyr (Husar). Today, these men, through the warm hands of Patriarch Lubomyr, bless us and enliven this treasure, making it eloquent and enlightening for contemporary Ukrainians. "Holiness of the united people of God" is and will be the strategy of development of our Church. She lives and acts as one body in the world, as a Church on a universal scale – it is and shall be the soul of the Ukrainian people, in order to sanctify them, to open their hearts to their brothers and neighbors, to preserve our nation as the people of God and lead it to salvation and eternal life.

Today we are experiencing a new spring of our Church, which in its resurrection becomes younger through the Holy Spirit and smiles anew to the world with the light of Christ's Gospel. It is about her – ancient yet eternally new – that the psalmist sings: "Who satisfies your life with good things, and your youth shall be renewed like the eagle's." (Ps. 102:5) Today, especially on this festive day, let us realize anew that we are renewed and rejuvenated Church. That is why I want to especially appeal to our – mostly still young – clergy, religious, and the entire Ukrainian youth! Today, Christ calls us, the young, to be responsible for His Church! Let us embrace her, place the Precious and Life-giving Cross of our Savior in the center of our lives – and He will sweeten it, like the rod of Moses sweetened the waters of Marah in the desert! Let us accept and boldly implement our Christian vocation in the modern world, and together we can renew the face of our nation and its state.

"We worship Your Passion, O Christ! Show also unto us Your glorious Resurrection!"

Amen.

(translated by Leo Twaskiw)