



September 2, 2009

HIS EMINENCE'S REFLECTIONS ON THE FEAST DAY OF THE ELEVATION OF THE HOLY AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

Soon we will celebrate the blessed Feast Day of the Elevation of the Holy and Life-giving Cross.

The finding of the Holy Cross is of course an historical event. Naturally we all know the story of how St. Helena discovered the Cross in the foundation of the Temple in Jerusalem. St. Helena was born in Bithynia, about 250AD; died in Nicomedia, 330AD. She knew both the heights of exultation and the depths of humiliation, yet she remained faithful. The daughter of a lowly innkeeper, she married the Roman general Constantius Chlorus and bore him a son, Constantine. In 293, when Constantius was proclaimed Caesar, he renounced Helena and married the Emperor's stepdaughter. While her husband ruled the empire, the repudiated Helena waited patiently in exile. But her son never forgot his mother. After his victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine entered Rome and seized the title of emperor. He then conferred the title "augusta" on his mother, and ordered that she be honored as the mother of a sovereign.

In 324, Helena made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Emperor Hadrian had built a Temple to Venus over Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre. Helena ordered its removal, and there she found the True Cross. Afterward she remained in the Holy Land to supervise the building of a magnificent new church on the site where she found the Cross.

But Helena is not a saint simply because she found the Cross of Christ. She loved the poor, and went about dressed humbly and

modestly. In her last years in Palestine, Eusebius wrote that she "continually worshipped in church in the sight of all, humbly dressed among the women praying there. In addition, she beautified the churches with ornaments and decorations, not forgetting the chapels of the least significant towns and villages." She built basilicas on the Mount of Olives (the Eleona) and in Bethlehem, travelled throughout Palestine, and was known for her kindness to soldiers, the poor, and prisoners.

These are the actual historical events that we celebrate, and if we think about the meaning of the Cross itself, we can more readily understand the love of the Son of God for us all. The Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Divine Logos, gave Himself out of love for us so that all human beings could be reconciled and restored to relationship with God, which had been destroyed by the devil and by man's disobedience.

This is the lesson that we need in today's society more than ever. In order to live in peace and harmony, we must strive to work at loving one another, as He first loved us. The practice of love is something that is not always easy, but we must continue to share with others, so that we will have the abundant life that He promises us. As St. Paul tells us, no matter what other gifts and abilities we have, "if we have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3) but he also assures us that "Love never fails."