SERMON - Sunday before the Elevation, John 3:13-17, September 9, 2018

I think that all of us have pivotal moments in our life when in particular we became aware of Jesus Christ and the Lord entered into our hearts. You might say that during these special moments there was a shattering explosion within us, time seemed to stand still, and we were profoundly changed and saw the world and ourselves differently as a result. These experiences are special gifts of God's mercy and love to us. I will share one of these personal moments in my life with you. I was about five or six years old, and on the television Jesus was shown in Jerusalem hanging on the cross. My simple child's eyes were filled with wonder and, although a child, I could understood that this was God Himself hanging on a cross. I could understand the horror that the Lord was killed in a very terrible and painful manner, yet I could understand that this crucifixion was the ultimate expression of love, forgiveness, kindness and goodness. Words were not necessary. I don't recall a single word spoken by a narrator or anyone else. All I had to do was to see with my eyes and I understood. Fast forward many years later, and now I am sixty years old. I am ashamed to say that throughout my lifetime, I have very often become immune to the deep emotion that I experienced as a child. Complacency is a terrible sin. The Lord says in the Scriptures, "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16). How painfully often have I looked at the cross and it ceased to have a profound affect on me. In my complacency, the Holy Cross became merely a symbol, an emblem, or even worse, merely a decoration.

Think for a moment if someone you knew and loved fell victim to the murderous cruelty of others in order to save your life, in order to save you personally. Could you ever return to those things which caused his death? Could you, could any of us play with life? Could we live foolishly? Could we choose evil, however we try to disguise it in one way or another? If we knew that because we had made this choice—perhaps a small choice, but a murderous one—a beloved person, or simply a person, had to die because of it?

The Son of God freely and willingly became fully human and died on a cross for our salvation. "God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." How can we ever forget that? St. Paul never forgot this. St. Paul said that for him life is Christ and Christ is life. St. Athanansius the Great, in his explanation of the incarnation, says that Christ came into the world in order to give life back to humanity. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom said the following: "Paul says, 'I know what it means to have discovered eternal life; I know what it means to have discovered Christ, to discover everything that in life that has a value in contrast to all the things which we serve slavishly. Discover them, he would say to us, go back into your soul, into your past, to the first moment when Christ entered into your life, into your heart, the moment of wonder, the moment of joy, the moment of liberation, and then live by it, leaving aside all that is dark, all that is deadly, lifeless, ugly! Choose for light, choose for life, choose for joy—all these things are contained in the Name of God and in the love of God in Christ. Amen."