YOU WILL EITHER LOVE THE CROSS OR HATE IT

Bp. Michał Stobnicki

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

Dear faithful, we human beings have this trait about us: it is very hard for us to admit even the smallest fault. It is very hard for us to admit that we have done something wrong or neglected something. Not only before others, but also before ourselves. And we are a little like Adam and Eve, who committed original sin and began to pass responsibility back and forth, to shift the blame. Adam pointed: it was not I, it was Eve. Eve: it was not I, it was the serpent. It is always others who are guilty, but never we. We have grown accustomed, my dear ones, to shifting our guilt onto our neighbours, onto circumstances, onto the times in which we live. Each of us has his own collection of culprits, seated on an ever more crowded bench of the accused.

When we shift responsibility like this, when we look for a justification for ourselves, when we notice the speck in our neighbour's eye, when everyone and everything bothers us, when we search for whom else we could burden with our own failures, falls, sins and negligences, suddenly there stands among us the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour, who takes all the guilt upon Himself, the guilt of you and of me. He of whom Saint Peter writes: He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree of the cross, that we, having died to sin, might live to righteousness. There stands before us the Saviour, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He of whom Isaiah uttered a moving prophecy: "We saw Him. He has no comeliness nor beauty, despised and the lowest of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity. We esteemed Him as a leper, as one struck by God and humbled. But He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our wickedness, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, everyone has turned aside into his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Dear faithful, on this feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross we bow once again over the mystery of redemption. We realise that the Lord Jesus, in whom there was not the slightest stain of sin, took upon His shoulders the guilt of all the people who have ever lived, are living, and will live in this world. He, without stain, takes upon His shoulders the burden of our sins in order that, through the blood shed on the cross, He might tear us from the claws of Satan, tear us from sin, from all that is evil, wash us in His most precious Blood and give us new life.

INDIFFERENCE TO THE CROSS

My dear ones, one cannot be indifferent to Christ's cross. There are no people in this world who are indifferent to the cross. Either one loves the cross or one hates it. Either one is grateful for the redemption, for the fact that the Lord Jesus took our guilt, our sins, upon Himself, or one rejects this Saviour, despises Him, spits in His face. One cannot be indifferent to the mystery of the cross, because it touches the very essence, the very meaning of our life here on earth. Either we will benefit from the fruits of the redemption, profess the Catholic faith, approach the holy sacraments, and in this way save our souls, or we will reject the fruits of the redemption, trample them, despise all that the Lord Jesus has done for us, and condemn ourselves to eternal damnation in hell.

BERTA BAUER AND LICHEŃ

And allow me to relate to you two short stories. Stories from the time of the Second World War, which will make us realise that the cross is either loved or hated. As Saint Paul already wrote: the cross, which is a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to God.

During the Second World War, a Hitler Youth camp was set up on the territory of the parish in Licheń. Young people were drilled in cruelty, in hatred of

everything Catholic, everything Polish. And one German woman, Berta Bauer, particularly distinguished herself in corrupting young people. In July 1944 she resolved to prove to her charges that there is no God. And during the session she drew a pistol and fired a dozen or so shots at a crucifix, and said: "You see, if God existed, He should punish me immediately." And she burst out laughing. That cross is preserved in Licheń to this day. That cross is surrounded by the veneration of the faithful; it is a memorial, a testimony to what a man who hates God is capable of.

And what happened to Berta Bauer? That very same day, as she was riding to the station in Konin on a cart with other people, by mistake — through what we would call chance, but there is no chance — an approaching German aeroplane opened fire, and she was killed, riddled with the bullets which she herself had aimed that same day at the Cross of Christ. No one else was wounded. She alone fell dead.

ARCHBISHOP NOWOWIEJSKI

Dear faithful, in the time of the Second World War the shepherd of the Church in nearby Płock was a great, distinguished bishop, a son of the Polish nation, who had received the title of archbishop *ad personam*. Archbishop Antoni Julian Nowowiejski, of great merit to the Church, a distinguished liturgist, author of many textbooks and books on which whole generations of priests were raised. In 1940 he was arrested, together with his auxiliary bishop, Bishop Wetmański, by the German Hitlerite invaders, and imprisoned in the concentration camp in Działdowo. He was then 83 years old. A white-haired old man who aroused the hatred of the German soldiers. Hatred because he was smiling, he bore peace, he comforted his fellow prisoners, strengthened them, and on his breast he wore a pectoral, a gilded episcopal cross. And the Germans could not bear the sight of this old man with a cross on his breast.

And one day, when they ordered a roll call on a muddy square, one of the German soldiers tore the pectoral from the archbishop's breast and threw it into the mud. Archbishop Nowowiejski then knelt down, wiped the dirt from this cross and kissed it. This provoked the fury of hell. The Germans threw themselves upon him and began to beat him with their boots. Not long afterwards he died as a result of the injuries he had suffered. And these two stories show what I told you: the cross of the Lord Jesus is either hated or loved.

RAISING THE CROSS

And today we may ask what this exaltation of the Holy Cross means. A feast established to commemorate the great victory of the Byzantine emperor, who defeated the Persian army and recovered from the hands of the Persians the relics of the Holy Cross stolen from Golgotha, from the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. It was on the fourteenth of September, in a solemn procession, that the emperor carried those relics back to Golgotha, returned them to the place from which they had been stolen by the pagans.

But this exaltation of the Holy Cross in your life need not be so solemn. Perhaps one day it will fall to you to pick up a cross that someone has thrown into the mud. Perhaps it will fall to you to glue back together, to rebuild a wayside shrine, a cross toppled by an ungodly hand. Perhaps it will fall to you to teach someone to trace upon himself the sign of the cross, by which we profess the two greatest mysteries of our faith: faith in one God in the Holy Trinity, and faith in the work of redemption accomplished on the cross through the blood shed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We live, my dear ones, in a world in which more and more people hate the cross of the Lord Jesus, who would like the cross to disappear once and for all from the landscape. It is removed in this way even from church towers, so as not to offend the feelings of those who believe differently, or of atheists. It vanishes from the breasts of Catholics, it is blotted out, it vanishes from history. And the question is how you will behave in all this. Are you closer to Berta Bauer? Are you closer to Archbishop Nowowiejski?

You cannot remain indifferent to the cross of Christ. If you do not love it, if you are not ready to kneel down to pull it out of the mud, wipe the dirt from it and kiss it, then sooner or later you will begin to hate it. Just as the spiritual heirs of Berta Bauer do, today's pseudo-elites from Brussels, their faithful Polish-speaking servants in our country. Either you will

come to love the cross, or you will come to hate it. The choice is yours.

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