**TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 14 – XIV WEEK O.T. [B]**

**EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS**

**“No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."**

**With these words, Jesus reveals Nicodemus his mystery. What is the mystery of Christ Jesus? We would immediately say that it is a mystery of descent from Heaven with the Incarnation and of ascension to Heaven with the glorious resurrection and the transformation of his body into spirit. We would say that Jesus descended from Heaven and to Heaven He ascended. John says exactly otherwise. Only one ascended to Heaven. Only one and no one else ascended to Heaven. Who has already ascended to Heaven? The one who descended from Heaven, the Son of man. John already sees the mystery of glorification. Jesus ascends to heaven on the day of his glorious ascension.**

**“The Son of Man” is the title loved by Jesus to define himself, since it is emptied of every political connotation. As one can ascertain, for John Jesus is always contemplated in the mystery of his glorious resurrection. Jesus is the risen. He is the One who has already ascended to Heaven. He ascended to Heaven since He descended from Heaven. The mystery is perfect, complete. This is the mystery of Jesus: glorious ascension and incarnation. John sees Jesus as he spoke to Nicodemus already from Heaven, from the fullness of his mystery already fulfilled. He can do it since Jesus has already been glorified and He is really in Heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**Now one passes to the mystery that must be fulfilled on earth. Jesus compared himself to the serpent lifted up by Moses in the desert. The serpent in the desert was a sign for the Israelites. Their life had been set on that pole. The one who looked at the serpent remained alive, the one who refused to look at it died. Jesus is this bronze serpent for all eternity. The pole on which He will be lifted up is the cross. He was really lifted up, He was really placed at the centre of the men’s camp. What is the condition to remain alive or not to die?**

**The condition is only one: believing in Him. Not only does whoever believes in Him not die, he receives the eternal life as gift. He receives God as gift who is eternal life for every man. Between the bronze serpent and Christ Jesus, the difference is substantial, though. The bronze serpent let the one who was bitten by the real serpent and who went to certain death live. Instead Jesus lifted up on the cross fills with eternal life those who look at Him with faith, namely those who believe in Him. But what does it exactly mean to believe in Him? It means to build one’s life on his Word, after having kneaded it with the charity of his grace and with the hope of his faithfulness. The gaze of faith must involve our entire person and all our life. God is the eternal life. In Christ Jesus God makes himself eternal life of his children, today in this particular time of history. But what does it exactly mean “believing in Him”? It means to accept Him, becoming one thing with Him, letting oneself be transformed by his mystery of grace and truth, become for the entire world mystery of grace and truth. One looks at Christ lifted up for us on the cross. One looks at Him, one believes in Him, one becomes one only thing with Him, one only life, one only body. The eternal life is Himself who gives himself as our life and turn us into his life. The faithful in Christ is turned into life of Christ. As the eternal life is God and this life is in Christ, so the Christian draws the eternal life who is in Christ by the means of the faith in Him and becomes eternal life for the entire world.**

**Let us read the text of Jn 3,13-17**

**“No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.**

**Now all the love of the Father is revealed. The Father loves men so much to give them his Only Begotten Son. Giving means: sacrificing on the cross. The sacrifice on the cross is the manifestation of the love of God for man. God really lets his Son be sacrificed on the cross. He does all of this for love toward us. Even the Virgin Mary, who was constituted by the Son Mother of the Disciple on the cross, offered the Father her Only Begotten Son. She offered Him for the redemption of the world. But when does this sacrifice become efficacious for us? When does it produce fruits of eternal life for us? It produces them when we believe in Christ Jesus. Believing does not mean, however, looking at Him as the children of Israel looked at the bronze serpent in the desert. Believing in Jesus means accepting Him, his truth, his grace, letting oneself be turned into grace and truth, testify this transformation through a life entirely lived in the Word of the Gospel. Whoever believes this way in Christ Jesus is not lost. Whoever believes this way in Christ Jesus fills himself with eternal life, becomes eternal life for all his brothers. Whoever believes this way in Christ Jesus becomes for his part a sacrifice pleased to the Lord, as well. In Christ, the Father gives whoever believes in Christ for the salvation of the world. One has true faith in Christ Jesus when his mystery of death becomes our same mystery, one only mystery: his in us and ours in His.**

**Without this specific faith in Him, his sacrifice remains inefficacious for us. The gift of the Father remains with no fruit of salvation for us. Faith is the way of the eternal life in us. But not an external faith to us, without us, out of us. Faith is what turns us into Christ, that makes us one only life with Him, in only death, one only resurrection, one only mission, one only sacrifice, one only oblation, one only holocaust.**

**God has not sent the Son into world to condemn the world. Namely: he has not sent Him to operate the final judgement. The Son has not come for the judgement. He will come for the judgement. Now He has been sent so that the world is saved by the means of Him. Now Jesus is the salvation of the world. He is the salvation in the faith in Him. Let us repeat it: the faith in Him is the only way of the salvation of the world. Without faith in Him, there is no salvation. We already know what “faith in Him” or “believing in Him” means: becoming with Christ one only mystery of truth, of grace, of death, of resurrection. The eternal life is in this indivisible unity with Christ. Whoever creates this unity has faith. Whoever does not create this unity does not have faith.**

**Here is how the Apostle Paul announces the mystery of faith in Christ Jesus: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For the scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring (the) good news!" But not everyone has heeded the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what was heard from us?" Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” (Rm 10,9-17) Today, not only does one no longer announce Christ Jesus as the only way, truth, grace given by God for our life. One does no longer speak of Him. Thus one deprives every man of the access to the tree of true life. Not speaking of Christ is as if the Church had decided to put “the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3, 24) May the Mother of Jesus preserve us from such horrible crime. Amen.**