

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.**

**For the word of the
cross is folly to those
who are perishing, but
to us who are being
saved it is the power
of God.**

I Corinth. I, 18.

The Armenian Church is celebrating today the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, one of the five major feasts of the Church and the most important of the four feasts of the Holy Cross. The Exaltation, known as Khachverats in Armenian, is connected with historical events in the sixth century that were very close to home for us Armenians and it is a must that every Armenian knows about it.

The cross on which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified was cast aside together with the crosses of the two others executed on Golgotha and gradually the rubble that was piled up buried them underneath. At the beginning of the fourth century, when the Empress Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great, visited Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, she made a special effort to discover the Holy Cross. Through a miracle she succeeded in locating the venerable symbol of salvation which was kept in Jerusalem and adored by all Christians, both natives as well as pilgrims from distant lands.

Since apostolic times the Holy Cross had become the symbol of salvation for all Christians as is clear from the above statement of St. Paul. According to our tradition, St. James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, exalted a cross in the likeness of the original and venerated it as a holy item. Since those early times all Christians honored and worshipped the noble idea of salvation connected with the cross, so that it became the symbol with which Christian faith, Christian nations, kingdoms and the Eastern Roman Empire were associated. The arch-rival of this Christian empire, Zoroastrian Persia, succeeded in reaping a series of major victories in the early years of the seventh century. The Persian forces entered the holy city of Jerusalem in 614 and took captive the Holy Cross in order to insult the Christians. The Holy Cross was taken to Persia and kept there under guard.

The humiliation was unbearable for the Christians throughout the world. The most sacred item in Christendom had to be rescued.

An enormous crusade was organized under the leadership of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, an Armenian by birth and the founder of a powerful dynasty. The emperor entered Armenia, which was mostly under Persian rule, and there he was joined by Armenian armies led by the Armenian nobleman Mzhezh Knouni. The joint Armenian Greek armies fought the Persian for more than six years and finally in 628 they vanquished the Persians, seizing the capital of Persia.

Heraclius and his joint forces rescued the Holy Cross which they carried back through Armenia. According to Armenian traditions, several pieces of the Holy Cross were cut and placed at different sites in Armenia where monasteries were built at a later time. At most of these places relics of the Holy Cross were venerated as late as 1915. Two of these relics made their way to the United States and are now in the possession of the Diocese of the Armenian Church.

The emperor Heraclius carried the Holy Cross to Jerusalem and reinstated it on the rock of Golgotha. The Cross was exalted or raised high through the course of the journey and particularly in Jerusalem.

Every Christian must understand why we venerate the Holy Cross and why we Armenians pay more attention to it than others. One sees crosses on the domes and walls of our churches, on our altars, in our homes and all over. Our churches have cruciform plans and our priests bless the congregation with crosses. Both sexes in our tradition are given crosses at the time of baptism and wear them with pride. We put chaplets with crosses on the heads of those making the marriage vow and decorate our houses with crosses of different shape and size. We also name our children Khachig, Khachadoor; in medieval times our ancestors also used the feminine forms of these as well.

The veneration we have for the cross should not be confused with idolatry. We worship the idea or the mystery behind the Holy Cross. What was once the instrument of death has become a vessel of salvation for mankind because the Saviour shed his blood over it. This contrast or change from one extreme to the other, from death to life, reflects our expectations and hopes from the Sign of the Cross. The presence of that sign at every stage and every turn in our lives will remind us that blood was shed over the original cross to free us from our sins. As frequently as we confront a cross we must be aware of our sinful ways and consider how we can rid ourselves of spiritual decay. Our mortal nature is such that we are always prone to make the wrong choice. Knowing this, our ancestors surrounded themselves with crosses in order to remind themselves of their

weakness. We must benefit from their wisdom and keep our reflections always focused on the mystery of the Holy Cross. Amen.

- Location of Monument : M C II ex - Inf. Center
- " Bishop Khajag "
 - " Sermons "
 - " Exaltation of the Holy Cross "