

**Homily on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**  
**Rev. Richard C. Hermes, S.J.**  
**September 14, 2018**

One month ago, on August 7, we celebrated this chapel's Dedication Mass. Hundreds of alumni, parents, current students, and others participated in that glorious celebration. We chose August 7 because it is the anniversary, going back to 1814, when the Society of Jesus was restored to existence throughout the whole Church by Pope Pius VII, 41 years after it had been suppressed by an earlier Pope. It was significant to dedicate on that date this majestic and beautiful temple to God -- Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam, as the inscription says on the entablature above the entrance portico. That date in 1814 marks the restoration of the Society of Jesus, a restoration that made possible the Jesuit missionary activity of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the eventual founding of this school in 1899. It is our hope that the dedication of Holy Cross chapel on August 7, 2018, will mark and help spark a renewal of authentic Christian life in our midst, here on campus at Jesuit, among the students and faculty.

By authentic Christian life, I mean simply this: a life that knows the power of the Cross and the glory of the Cross, a life that boasts not in one's own achievements, but in our Crucified Lord and what He chooses to accomplish through us. For this reason a majestic cross has been placed at the apex of this Chapel for all in Tampa to see in what and in whom we place our trust. For the same reason the image of Christ and his holy Cross at the high altar confronts each visitor with the most vivid and powerful symbol of God's love.

Now today, we celebrate the historic first student Mass. This chapel is a student chapel – built above all for you and your spiritual life. It is a chapel in which you will worship God together at Mass, adore His Son in the Blessed Sacrament, receive the nourishment of the Holy Eucharist, and hear the words of absolution as you have your sins forgiven. Some of you will be baptized and confirmed here. Not a few of you will be married here. I pray that those who hear and answer the call of the Lord to the priesthood will celebrate your first Masses here. Beginning in a few weeks, you will all be here for daily convocation, to begin each day turning towards the crucified Lord in prayer, under the sign of the Holy Trinity, hearing from convocation speakers, and learning about each other's activities and encouraging each other in your achievements and challenges. And, beginning today, the Tiger clap will sound thunderously in these walls many, many times. You will be able to tell your sons and grandsons, and their sons, that you participated in this first Mass and anticipated in prayer the great events of their high school years in this chapel.

And so it is providential that the first student Mass in the chapel of the Holy Cross coincides with the Feast of the Triumph or Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Trust me, human beings cannot plan these things. An ancient Church father wrote, "What a great thing it is to possess the Cross! He who possesses it possesses a great treasure." By possessing the Cross, St. Andrew of Crete meant living in communion with God. Today's Gospel tells us what that means. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that men might be saved." The wood of the Cross is our salvation.

On the wood of the Cross, God's Son humbled himself and took the form of a slave. He invites us to do the same. To humble ourselves in all our activities, especially our achievements. To humble ourselves in seeking out ways to serve others, not for reward, not for gain or praise, but because in the suffering and needs of others we encounter the presence of God, and like our Lord and Master, we desire to put our lives at their service. In this way, and no other, we possess the great treasure of the Cross.

As you leave the chapel this morning, contemplate for a moment the figure of St. Paul Miki, the Japanese Jesuit who was crucified like the Lord Jesus on what became known as Martyrs' Hill. St. Paul Miki's death was quite literally conformed to the death of Christ because in his life he possessed the treasure of the Cross, the love of God to the end. Or gaze on the peaceful face of Blessed Miguel Pro, the Mexican Jesuit martyred by his own countryman, in his own country's capital city – not even 100 years ago, while students of this school were in bed, resting for another day of study and school life in downtown Tampa. Observe how Miguel Pro, literally at the crucial moment of his life, stretches out his arms and make his whole body the form of the Cross and then proclaims with words – Viva Cristo Rey – long live Christ the King! – the treasure that he has in his heart.

May this chapel of stone help you turn to Christ and desire the treasure he offers you. May the saints depicted here inspire you and accompany you in your daily lives. And may Christ himself, and his holy Cross – God's very love for us -- be the treasure you seek each day at Jesuit and the treasure you possess for all eternity. Amen.