

**Homily – Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross
Byzantine Melkite Eparchy of Newton, Annual Clergy Convocation
Hierarchical/Pontifical Divine Liturgy – San Fernando Cathedral
September 14, 2021, 10:00 am**

Thank you, Bishop Nicholas Samra, for your invitation to address all of you this morning, and thank you for choosing San Antonio for your annual clergy gathering. Thank you brothers for your presence and for your ministry.

Exactly a year ago today, at this Cathedral, I proclaimed my pastoral letter “Transformed by Hope, Let Us Rebuild Our Tomorrow!” on the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. I thank God’s providence for the opportunity to commemorate the occasion with you. I believe it is a prophetic sign.

In the pastoral letter, I highlighted that “our suffering matters so much to Jesus that he participates in our pain to overcome it, and to draw good out of evil, which only He can do.” As Pope Francis has said, our Lord Jesus Christ cares about us more than anyone. “Giving his life for us, Jesus says to each one: ‘Your life is worth so much to me, that to save it I give all of myself’.” On the Cross, Jesus suffered as a consequence of our sins for our suffering to have meaning in him. He took upon himself the just punishment for the wrongdoings of mankind, to accomplish justice in mercy in order to save us. Henceforth, there is no obstacle for God’s mercy; all we need is to accept it by making his holy instrument – the Life-Giving Cross – the meaning of our own lives. Such is his pedagogy for a time like this and for our entire lives, making us sharers in his own mission.

Not only for the Gentiles and the Jews in Paul’s time, but for us too, the cross may be seen as a stumbling block or foolishness when

everything seems to go right and we feel safe and comfortable. A time like this provides a unique opportunity for the Church to free herself from different forms of self-absorption, renewing our encounter with the Lord and improving our prophetic efficacy. Your presence here accomplishes exactly that for us.

Ourselves becoming signs of contradiction for today's world means prophesizing with our ministry – but especially through our witness – that love and truth are not only not opposed, but they are One and the same. They are not some-thing to be formulated, chosen or affirmed, but some-One to be encountered, followed and announced: Our Lord Jesus Christ. His Cross is the ultimate proof that He is the truth, the Word of God, and He communicates to us the fact that God is love. Through the water and blood flowing from his side, He communicates God's own Love to us – the Holy Spirit – and love breeds new life. By turning the instrument for his death into the sign of God's love, He conquered death, leaving us the invincible hope that the Holy Spirit inspires in our hearts.

For me and for the Church Universal, the holy tradition of the Byzantine Rite and your witness as a particular Church offers a splendid prophetic announcement of the good news of the Life-Giving Cross. You convey a sense of history that emphasizes the apostolic dimension of the Church, connecting her in faithfulness to the One who appointed the apostles. Your fidelity stresses the strength of our bonds of communion, which you make shine forth through the magnificent beauty and richness of your traditions. From our viewpoint in the Roman Rite, the differences between us remind us that – as the Holy Father has said – “our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than

its parts, where every point is equidistant from the center, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.”

As we embark in the path entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,” toward the celebration of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October of 2023, I cannot avoid to recognize the contribution that the Eastern Catholic Particular Churches make to the life and mission of the Church Universal with regards to synodality. Even the Greek root of the word is reminiscent of your faithful attentiveness to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who speaks to all of us through the voice of each member, walking together as one body. That is precisely what you have come to do here. We are grateful for your witness to the boundless creativity of the Holy Spirit, who speaks through each one and through all.

Allow me to focus our gratitude on the specific impact you are making in the Archdiocese of San Antonio, not only through Three Hierarchs Mission, but even at our Archdiocesan Pastoral Center in our Department of Communications. Thank you Janet, Fr. John Mefrige and your four children. Your collaboration provides an exceptional contribution and is a source of joy, as you help us welcome, protect, promote and integrate many people of faith into our community.

Thank you also, brothers, for your ancient fervent love and devotion for the Theotokos! Standing at the foot of the Cross, she is the figure and mirror of the Church. She is also our model, to suffer for Christ and with Him. May she give us the strength to remain close to the Cross of Jesus.