

Exaltation of the Holy Cross

(2014)

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- Today we celebrate the feast of the Exaltation (or “Triumph”) of the Holy Cross—that instrument of infamy and death which, through Christ, became the altar of the infinite sacrifice and the vehicle of our salvation.
- By Jesus’ crucifixion that simple, wooden, rough-hewn, blood-soaked cross was transformed into the image—and the means—of our redemption...and through that redemption, our salvation.
- The cross...that sign of ultimate disgrace...also becomes the challenge and path to eternal glory...first for Jesus, and then by all of us who call ourselves His disciples.
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- What a paradox! St. Paul wrote: “*Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...*”, (1Co 1:22-24 RSV)
- That horror...that revulsion at the idea of crucifixion is the reaction of anyone first introduced to the cross: How can salvation come by a disgraceful cruel punishment reserved for slaves (cf. Phil 2.8)? How can salvation come from a condemned man, who becomes a curse?...for scripture says: “*Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree*” (Gal 3:13 RSV)
- And yet...Jesus had affirmed the cross as necessary to His obedience to the will of the Father (Mt 16.21)...and after Pentecost, the apostles themselves—inspired by the Holy Spirit--preach the cross and its scandal as part of the plan of God.
- Paul writes: “*I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*” (1Co 2:1-2 RSV)... “*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.*” (1Co 1:18 RSV)
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- For in the cross shines forth the wisdom of God’s plan...the power of God—the depth of His love—shown through the weakness of man.
- In his love, as Peter writes: “...*Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps...He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*” (1Peter 2:21-25 RSV)
- The cross thus becomes not so much suffering and humiliation as the anticipation of the glory of God, and a sign of Jesus’ triumph over death...and a sign of God’s love for each one of us...for “*the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mat 20:28 RSV), and “*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” (Joh 15:13 RSV) This is the reason for our love of the crucifix.
- St. Paul tells the Romans: “...*God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...*” (Rom 8:3 RSV)...nailing it to the cross. (Col 2.14)
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- The cross is the altar upon which our salvation is won. It is the tree of salvation which conquers the tree in the Garden of Eden which led to our condemnation. It is the tree of life which stands in the Heavenly Jerusalem, as we hear in Revelation: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.*” (Rev 22:14 RSV) The cross is the pinnacle of God’s love and work.
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- And so, we--Jesus’ disciples--are called to follow in His steps: “*If a person wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.*” (Mt 16:24)

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- Each of us has his own Via Dolorosa—Way of the Cross—which he must bear in patient suffering...finding his strength in Jesus' own patience and suffering.
- The cross is a sign of death to the world and the things of the world that entice men and women from God...and thus the Christian-like life IS folly to a world that has sex, drugs, wealth and power as its idols.
- So much of our cross stems from the determination to be faithful in all circumstances.
- The cross is the boundary separating two worlds—the flesh and the spirit. Paul writes: “...*the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other.*” (Gal 5:17 RSV)...and thus only in and through the cross are justification, righteousness, wisdom and salvation.
- We receive our strength and love from Christ. He tells us: “...*apart from me you can do nothing...*” (Joh 15:5 RSV)...and yet, as Paul writes, we know that “*I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*” (Phil 4:13 RSV)
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- And so the cross is not the shame, but rather the glory for Christians...that sign of obedience to God, of righteousness in His eyes, of endurance and strength in the struggle against evil. The cross is the sign of our victory.
- So be transformed by the wisdom of the cross...following the example of Jesus...walking in His steps...patient in suffering, uniting them--small or large--to the suffering of Christ.
- Let us resolve with St. Paul who said: “...*far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the*

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world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal 6:14 RSV)

- *“Therefore,” says the author of the letter to the Hebrews, “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [of the angels and saints], let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:1-2 RSV)*
- For by the cross we seek the Good...and it is by the cross we find our God...who Himself is eternal life.

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Reading 1

[Nm 21:4b-9](#)

With their patience worn out by the journey,
the people complained against God and Moses,
"Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert,
where there is no food or water?
We are disgusted with this wretched food!"

In punishment the LORD sent among the people saraph serpents,
which bit the people so that many of them died.
Then the people came to Moses and said,
"We have sinned in complaining against the LORD and you.
Pray the LORD to take the serpents from us."
So Moses prayed for the people, and the LORD said to Moses,
"Make a saraph and mount it on a pole,
and if any who have been bitten look at it, they will live."
Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole,
and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent
looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

[Ps 78:1bc-2, 34-35, 36-37, 38](#)

Responsorial Psalm

R. (see 7b) **Do not forget the works of the Lord!**

Hearken, my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter mysteries from of old.

R. **Do not forget the works of the Lord!**

While he slew them they sought him
and inquired after God again,
Remembering that God was their rock
and the Most High God, their redeemer.

R. **Do not forget the works of the Lord!**

But they flattered him with their mouths
and lied to him with their tongues,
Though their hearts were not steadfast toward him,
nor were they faithful to his covenant.

R. **Do not forget the works of the Lord!**

But he, being merciful, forgave their sin
and destroyed them not;
Often he turned back his anger

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and let none of his wrath be roused.

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!

[Phil 2:6-11](#)

Reading 2

Brothers and sisters:

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

[Jn 3:13-17](#)

Gospel

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"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.