

## Reflection for the Feast of the Holy Cross

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that he who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. John 3:16*

This verse that is part of our Gospel reading today on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, provides us with a message of how much God loves us. His love is so complete that He sends His only Son into the world for our salvation. This speaks volumes of who God is and what He wants for us and the whole world. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which is celebrated every year on September 14, provides us with a reminder of how much God loves us.

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, also known as the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, commemorates three historical events. First, the discovery of the True Cross in 326, by Saint Helena, a devout Catholic and the mother of Emperor Constantine. Second, following the discoveries of the Holy Cross, Mount Calvary, and Christ's tomb, Emperor Constantine ordered the construction of a Church to encompass these sites and to house the True Cross. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was erected and dedicated on September 13, 335. It was on September 14, 335 that the first showing and exaltation of the Holy Cross took place, so that the faithful could venerate the True Cross. Over the next three centuries in Jerusalem there was an annual Feast and veneration of the Holy Cross. Third, the recovery of the Cross from the Persians in the 628. In the year 614, the Persians invaded Jerusalem and took the Holy Cross as a trophy. Eight years later, in 622, the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius initiated a military campaign to recapture Jerusalem and the True Cross. The Emperor, was successful in the year 628, and in 629 he entered Jerusalem with the True Cross, restoring it to the Church. Following this triumphant event the Feast of the Holy Cross, on September 14<sup>th</sup>, became a universal celebration, starting in Rome and spreading throughout the entire world.

It is important to note that the Holy Cross has never been worshiped but only venerated, for it is on this wood that Jesus Christ saved the whole world. Also, one should note that what is at the core of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is not the historical events or the discovery of the Holy Cross and its return, nor the physical wood of the Cross. It is the infinite love shown through the selfless and perfect Sacrifice of the Son of God and the boundless mercy that has poured forth upon the world because of this perfect Sacrifice. What makes the Holy Cross, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre sacred is not the historical events but rather the perfect love that Jesus Christ shares on the Cross and at these holy sites.

The four verses of our Gospel Reading this Sunday speak of the perfect love that God has for humanity. It is important to note that our Gospel Reading this Sunday is part of a larger section of the Gospel of John, that provides us with a message. This larger section is all of chapter three. This chapter in the Gospel of John focuses on what Jesus Christ is bringing into the world and how it (the New Covenant) fulfills and replaces all that had come before. It is upon the Holy Cross that Jesus provides evidence of the love that God has for the whole world. We can look through the history of the world and see the love that God has for the world. Throughout the Old Testament, time and again we see God saving His people, clearly this is evidence of the love that God has for us. Jesus being born of the virgin, His institution of the seven Sacrament, the miracles that He performs in this world are all evidence of the love that He has for humanity. But the singular act of Christ's death and His rising from the dead, speaks of a love that knows no bounds. We live in a world with limits and boundaries, that is just the nature of our physical world, limits exist in this world. The limits of our world can be comforting because they provide us with structure and boundaries that can provide a sense of security. Through the singular act on the Holy Cross, Jesus Christ has shattered the limits and boundaries of this world and has opened up for us a love we could of only dreamed of before this act of love.