

## Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Cycle A

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Back in my mid 40s, I would have these headaches after a day of working on the computer. Since all my life I had 20-20 vision, I just denied it was my changing eye sight and endured. When my wife convinced me I needed to see the eye doctor and it was reinforced by my yearly check up, I found out I needed much more than just mild reading glasses. Even then I delayed for a few months fulfilling the prescription. I just did not want to see the truth of the matter, no pun intended. Today, all the readings in one form or another call us to see clearly the difficult situations we find ourselves and hopefully be remind to see the Cross on which Jesus the Christ was hung. The only way we can understand the reminder of what happened on the Cross is to see with the eyes of faith and selfless love.

In the first reading, we are told a tale of the Chosen Peoples' agenda over their Lord's. They were tired of the journey and the exile. They were tired of the will of their Father in Heaven, and so needed reminders of who they were. The Father reminds them that they are the Chosen People, He is the reason for their very being, and they are to go out of their comfort zones and be living examples of His Love. Just as Adam and Eve were tempted to take the short cut and be distracted from their mission in life with the symbolism of the serpent story, we see it again in the first reading. The symbolism of the tempter in the form of a serpent is visited on the Chosen People in a very real way. But every human being has been "bitten" by the serpent which seduced Adam and Eve in the Garden. Every one of us has inherited the condition of original sin and we experience its consequences, even if we are baptized. Our inherited inclination, leads us to sin and so each time we do, we are "bitten" again. Just as there are real consequences to being bitten by a snake, there are very real consequences to giving in to sin – namely death results from both. So in a way we can see why God permits suffering in this life, because unfortunately, that is the way many of us begin to remember him again. God permits the suffering only so we can experience his mercy and that mercy includes being reminded of our call to live the lives the Father lays out for us. We are reminded to clearly see who we are and what we need to be about.

The Chosen People were reminded by the staff with the snake on it. If they looked up at this image of evil and death, they were reminded what they were to be about and so avoid the consequences and live. We too need to recognize the lies of evil for what they really are. We too need to see clearly our calling – namely to be an example of God's goodness in the world. Our greatest reminder to this call is a wooden cross. It should be easier for us than the Chosen People, because we have the luxury to see in a very real way that sin and death have been personified in the Passion of Christ where our Lord took on himself the sins of the world. So we can look on the cross with faith and simultaneously see clearly what causes death and the sacrificial victim who is the remedy for sin and death. If we look upon the crucified Christ with the eyes of faith, we will have life eternal. We are reminded to see clearly our purpose to be children of the Father.

In the second reading today, St. Paul explains Christ's *kenosis* or emptying: "The voluntary renunciation by Christ of his right to *divine privilege* in his humble acceptance of human status". This emptying or

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humility is the way of living a right life. Christ our Lord lived this emptying to such perfection that He became “obedient to death, even death on a cross.” Therefore, God the Father exalted Him to the greatest degree possible, making him Lord. This is why we glorify Christ crucified. This is why we venerate the wooden cross. So we can be reminded of how we are to live. We are to be Christians who follow Christ. We are to bear the crosses of life. We are to bear the humility of being different than the world around us because we are called to be living examples of the Father’s love.

In the gospel today, John encapsulates the very core of the kerygma - “the irreducible essence of Christian apostolic teaching”. God the Father sent his Son into the world to bring us salvation and eternal life. John 3:16 (*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son*) is justly famous and extremely attractive, but we miss something essential by taking it out of the context of the crucifixion. God the Father not only “gave” all humanity the gift of his Son but specifically “gave him over” to us sinful people, who lifted him up on the cross. On that cross, the passion of Christ, the Son in perfect humility performed His salvific mission for us, “so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.” Therefore the cross is lifted up, exalted, because through the eyes of faith, we recognize we can have eternal life. To not be misunderstood, during the Last Supper, Jesus both symbolized this offering and made it really present in the words, ‘This is my body which is given for you’ which we repeat for our reminder every time the Eucharist is celebrated.

So what do we do with all this? The Blessed Trinity offers us salvation and eternal life won through Christ crucified. We need “the reminders” of this reality and so should make them real in our lives with practical examples to “exalt the cross,” that is, to offer thanksgiving and praise to Christ crucified. We can start with the large crucifix over our altar, now you know why it is there. But we can use this image to help frame how we talk to our Lord in prayer every time we see it. In our homes, have at least one crucifix prominently displayed. This reminds us, our children and our neighbors who we are. When we make *The Sign of the Cross*, where we trace the shape of the cross from our head to our heart and across our shoulders while invoking the Blessed Trinity, be more attentive to the prayer that it contains. Many people find it helpful to keep a small blessed crucifix with them, and if possible within view when they work, and to look at it from time to time with love, and even to kiss it, to unite themselves in their work to Christ crucified. Thinking of Christ crucified is a very good accompaniment to offering up the small and large crosses that come into everyone’s daily life. *The Way of the Cross* with its fourteen stations is a means of mentally and physically tracing Our Lord’s final journey. We have these along the outside walls of our church building here. Find the value of walking the final steps of Jesus’ life not only during Lent, but during times of trial in our lives. Let us be reminded of how Jesus put up with an ignoble death because he accepted the will of the Father. Yes we need to see clearly what we are about and we are reminded by the Cross. Use it to frame our prayers and in a very real way our lives as Christians.