

EXALTATION OF THE CROSS; Sept 14th 2025
Numbers 21:4-9; Philippians 2:6-11; John 3:13-17

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This Sunday we celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross or the Triumph of the Cross. Though every year this feast commences on Sept 14th, it takes a few years to see it being celebrated on a Sunday. Why the Cross is exalted, as it is just two pieces of wood joined? The cross is exalted for the very reason that the one who is exalted forever, Jesus Christ, died on the Cross and gained eternal life for us.

During the time of Jesus in Palestine the cross was the symbol of cruel death and humiliation, as the Romans punished the Palestinian revolutionaries with death penalty on the cross. So the cross used to be nothing more than an instrument of torture and death. Naturally, no Jew would like even to think about a cross.

Everything changed the day Jesus was crucified. Once he died upon the cross, what was once merely an instrument of Roman punishment became in Christ the symbol of humans' salvation from pain and eternal death. It became an instrument of divine mercy, a symbol of love, and above all, our hope for God's total deliverance at the end of time.

In today's Gospel Jesus recalls the desert experience of Moses and the Israelites while Moses was leading them to the Promised Land. Many Israelites, due to the hardships on the way, spoke against the Lord. The Lord got angry at them and sent fiery serpents which killed many Israelites. The Lord relented when they begged and asked for forgiveness. Moses was instructed to make a symbolic serpent attached at the end of the pole and raise it up. God promised that whoever would be bitten needed only to look at the serpent and they would be healed.

In the same way, as Jesus says, the Son of Man would be raised on the cross and would be the source of life eternal for those who look at him and believe. This feast may refer to the triumph of the Christian Faith, symbolized by the cross. It is not the cross itself which is exalted but the saving action of Jesus through the cross. That which was a symbol of absurdity, scandal, pain, and death, had become the central symbol of the Christian Faith because of the meaning Jesus gave to it.

Though in the very beginning of their ministry the disciples proclaimed the Christ crucified, they have not given any particular attention to the cross itself. Actually, the veneration of the Cross started with the vision of Emperor Constantine in the 4th century. It happened that Constantine was fighting war with his opponent Maxentius for the

succession of the regime in Rome. Constantine won two wars, but almost lost the third one in 312 A.D. As he was pondering outside his tent as what to do next he saw the vision of a big cross in the sky with the note, in Latin "*In hoc signo vinces*, the translation of which is "*By this sign thou shalt conquer.*" In short, in the name of the Cross he succeeded to power. Eventually he became a Christian and Christianity became the official religion of Rome and the cross became the emblem on his flag.

In 324 A.D. Helena, the mother Constantine who too became a Christian made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and excavated the sight of the crucifixion. It is believed that she found the original Cross on which Jesus was crucified. Thus the vision of Constantine and the discovery of Helena made the Cross exalted. Ever since, down the centuries the Christians all over the world, irrespective of denominations, venerate and exalt the Cross as the symbol of their salvation.

Among the Apostles, St. Paul is the one who preached so much about the crucified Christ and his Cross. Paul in **1 Cor. 1: 18** says, "**The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.**" Again, in the same chapter in verses **22 & 23** Paul continues, "**For the Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles.**" Perhaps, you notice the Red Cross in the Medical Science. The Red Cross is used in medical science as a symbol of protection for medical services and humanitarian workers, particularly in armed conflicts, as established by the Geneva Conventions. In Galatians 6:14 Paul declares proudly, "**But may I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**"

G.K. Chesterton, the English Catholic author, comments on the cross, "*That terrible tree which is the death of God and life of man.*"

St. John Vianney says, **The cross is the hope of Christians, the staff of the lame, the comfort of the poor, the destruction of all pride, the victory over devils, the guide of youth, the pilot of mariners, the refuge of those who are in danger, the counselor of the just, the rest of the afflicted, the physician of the sick the glory of Martyrs.**

We also know that the Cross is the symbol of Christ's suffering and sacrifice. That is why Jesus instructs his disciples, "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*" When we carry our daily cross, it is not a burden on our shoulders but a great strength in our struggles.