Exaltation of the Holy Cross 2025

We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, here, and in all Your churches throughout the world, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, the image of the Cross is manifest. The Cross points towards the day when the image will become a reality, overflowing with the power of salvation for all who would partake of the fruit of this Tree, the fruit of which brings life, Jesus.

The scene in the first reading may seem primitive to us: our ancestors in the desert gazing up at the bronze serpent, mounted on a pole, and finding life in doing so. Evidently, Jesus didn’t find this too primitive. He uses the same image to refer to Himself, and how He would be lifted up on the pole of the Cross so that we might find life in the deserts and dark places of our lives. We are drawn to it. It draws us to its presence and power. As the Israelites were drawn to gaze on the bronze image of a serpent, that was death for them. We gaze upon the death our sins have caused, upon Jesus who bears the burden of our guilt, that we might be forgiven and redeemed, healed and saved.

We lift high the Cross, and celebrate Christ’s victory. We share in the victory of the Cross when we confess our sins, and acknowledge our need for mercy, the mercy the Cross offers us. Our ancestors brought their grumbling and hunger, their anger and fear to the bronze serpent lifted up on a pole. To the foot of the Cross, we bring human sin and complacency, human selfishness and pride, human carelessness and injustices. We do not exalt the cruelty of the Cross, but the Love that God manifested to humanity, Jesus, accepting death on the Cross, *“Who, though in the form of God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave.”* This is the glory of which St John speaks: the glory of Jesus shining on the world.

We celebrate this feast, but with an ache in our hearts for our brothers and sisters who are suffering torture, death, even crucifixion. We look to the Cross, to see the wounded Jesus who is our healing Lord, the thorned crown who is our sovereign King, the suffering Jesus who is our hope of glory, the victorious Jesus who is our promise of life forever.

*“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.”* The late Pope Benedict XVI wrote, *“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea. Being Christian is an encounter with an event.”* The Gospel the liturgy offers us on today’s feast is that God wants to enter into a relationship of love with everyone, Jesus, lifted up on the Cross.

Lifting up our gaze to God expresses our invitation to enter back into relationship with Him. We need to stop turning in on ourselves, uselessly nurturing a sense of guilt. With St Bonaventure we pray: *“Christ on the Cross bows His head waiting for you, that He may kiss you; He stretched out His arms, that He may embrace you; His hands are open that He may enrich you; His body is spread out, that He may give Himself totally; His feet are nailed, that He may stay there; His side is open for you, that He may let you enter there.”*

Let the lifting up of our gaze enkindle gratitude. This elevation is the measure of the love with which God loves us in His Son. This is the mercy of God, which, as in the heart of St Francis, illuminates the darkness of our lives and allows us to continue on our journey: *“Most High glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command.”*

