

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

John 3:13-17

God so loved the world

ONLY EVERY 5 OR 6 YEARS

ARE WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO CELEBRATE THIS FEAST DAY

OF THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS

ON A SUNDAY,

WHEN MOST OF US GATHER FOR MASS.

IN THE POPULAR MIND

THE REAL FEAST OF THE CROSS IS GOOD FRIDAY

WHEN OUR ATTENTION IS NATURALLY TURNED TO

HIS SUFFERING, DYING AND BURIAL.

WHY THIS FEAST IN THE FALL?

HISTORICALLY, SEPTEMBER 14TH, IN THE YEAR 320

IS THE DATE WHEN THE EMPRESS HELENA

(CONSTANTINE'S MOTHER)

REPORTEDLY FOUND THE TRUE CROSS.

WE ARE REMINDED, THOUGH, THAT TODAY'S FEAST OF THE CROSS

CELEBRATES THE SAME MYSTERY:

FOR CHRISTIANS THE CROSS IS LESS REMEMBERED

AS AN INSTRUMENT OF TORTURE AND DEATH

THAN AS AN INSTRUMENT

OF GLORY, SALVATION AND LIFE.

IN BOTH THE FIRST READING AND GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY,

THE INSTRUMENTS THAT BRING DEATH

(THE SERPENT AND THE CROSS)

ALSO BRING LIFE.

FOR THIS REASON,

THE CROSS IS NOT DESPISED BUT EXALTED.

NOW WE KNOW

HOW FAR AND HOW DEEP AND HOW WIDE

IS THE LOVE THAT THE FATHER HAS FOR US.

THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD

BECOMES FULLY REVEALED

IN THE DEATH OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

THIS FEAST IS A VERY IMPORTANT REMINDER FOR ME.

MY HUMAN TENDENCY IS TO FLEE

THAT WHICH BRINGS PAIN, SUFFERING, AND DEATH.

TODAY, I AM REMINDED

THAT WE ARE CHALLENGED TO SEE THESE

AS THE MEANS TO LIFE.

THIS FEAST DOES NOT MAKE IT ANY EASIER
TO ACCEPT PAIN, SUFFERING, AND DEATH;
**BUT IT DOES GIVE THESE NATURAL HUMAN EXPERIENCE
MEANING AND DEPTH.**

NO ONE WOULD NORMALLY CHOOSE SUFFERING AND DEATH
AS POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN THEIR LIVES.

YET CHRISTIANS REGULARLY DENY OURSELVES
FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS.

WE DO SO BECAUSE WE HAVE GRASPED THE GLORY OF THE CROSS
THIS GLORY MAKES OUR EVERYDAY DENIALS OF SELF
MEANS OF GROWTH AND HOLINESS.

BECAUSE OF THIS TRUTH,

VERY OFTEN, WHEN I VISIT PEOPLE IN THE HOSPITAL
WHO ARE SUFFERING A LOT

AND HOPE FOR A CURE IS NOT ON THE HORIZON,

I WILL SPEAK TO THEM EXACTLY ABOUT THIS MYSTERY

OF SUFFERING, PAIN AND THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

WE TALK ABOUT HOW IN OUR YOUNG YEARS,

DURING LENT

WE "GAVE UP" CANDY, OR POP

AND LATER, MOVIES, CIGARETTES, ALCOHOL.

THESE SACRIFICES WE CHOSE FREELY.

NOW, A DIFFERENT KIND OF SACRIFICE IS BEING ASKED OF US.

IN ILLNESS THERE IS THE LOSS OF FEELING GOOD
THE LOSS OF BEING ABLE TO GET AROUND
AND THERE IS NOW THE HURT AND THE PAIN.

I WILL OFTEN SPEAK TO THEM ABOUT A SITUATION
WHERE THE PEOPLE INVOLVED
NEED A LOT OF HELP
AND I ASK THE PATIENT IF THEY WILL OFFER UP THEIR PAIN
AND JOIN THEIR SUFFERINGS TO JESUS
IN ORDER TO GAIN A SPECIAL GRACE FOR THEM.

I WILL SHARE WITH THEM ABOUT THE PEOPLE IN R.C.I.A.
WHO ARE THINKING ABOUT GOD AND BECOMING CATHOLICS
AND I ASK THEM IF THEY WOULD MAKE THIS A FOCUS
OF OFFERING UP THEIR PAIN AND SUFFERING.

NONE HAVE REFUSED ME
SOME HAVE THANKED ME FOR HELPING THEM SEE
THE BENEFITS THAT CAN COME FROM THEIR ILLNESS.
MANY HAVE ALREADY LEARNED THIS TRUTH OVER THE YEARS
AND THEY HAVE BEEN JOINING THEMSELVES TO JESUS
AND OFFERING UP THEIR PAIN FOR OTHERS.
SINCE THE ILLNESS BEGAN.

I LEAVE THE HOSPITAL

A LOT MORE HUMBLE

AND A LITTLE MORE AWARE

OF THE POWER OF PRAYER

AND THE POWER OF SUFFERING.

AND I AM CONVINCED THAT THEY ARE DOING MORE FOR US

THAN WE WILL EVER KNOW – IN THIS WORLD.

BUT ALL THINGS WILL BE REVEALED IN THE NEXT ONE.

THIS IS A TRUTH THAT THIS WORLD

CANNOT KNOW OR UNDERSTAND

TODAY, ON THE FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS

I ASK GOD TO HELP YOU AND ME

UNDERSTAND THIS TRUTH A LITTLE BETTER

SO THAT IN THE MIDST OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

WE TOO WILL BECOME INSTRUMENTS OF GRACE.

COME JOIN ME IN ASKING GOD TO HELP US TO KNOW

AS I SIGN YOU WITH THE GIFT OF HIS CROSS.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT.