

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

By Al Mansfield

Numbers 21:4-9

Psalm 78

Philippians 2:6-11

John 3:13-17

HAIL THE CROSS, OUR ONLY HOPE!

Today the Church honors the Holy Cross of Jesus. This year, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross falls on a Sunday and is celebrated in place of the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Obviously, the Cross of Jesus is central - we could say "crucial" - to our Redemption.

NUMBERS

Our First Reading is the account of the Israelites complaining against the Lord and, as a result, being punished by saraph serpents. After Moses intercedes for the people, the Lord tells him to make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. All the afflicted who look at it will live.

This is, of course, a prefiguring of the Lord Jesus being lifted up on the Cross. All those who look upon him with repentance and faith will live.

The Responsorial, Psalm 78, praises the Lord for his mercy and forgiveness.

PHILIPPIANS

This is the beautiful and powerful hymn to Christ Jesus for emptying himself in becoming man, "a slave," and humbling himself, "becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."

The passage continues with the exaltation of Jesus, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

GOSPEL

In the gospel, Jesus himself interprets the Old Testament for us by comparing his own lifting up on the cross to Moses' lifting up the bronze serpent in the desert for the healing of the people.

Our gospel reading concludes with one of the most well-known verses in Scripture, John 3:16: "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."

AVE CRUX, SPES UNICA!

"Hail the Cross, our only hope!", says an ancient Latin hymn. So why do we honor the Cross, an instrument of one of the cruelest forms of execution known to history? Of course, we are actually honoring the Lord Jesus for his sacrificial death upon the Cross. But the Cross is vitally important because of its role and place in God's providential plan for the salvation of the human race. It has been said by the early Church Fathers that Satan, who conquered through a tree (Eve eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), was himself conquered through a tree (the tree of Jesus' death on the Cross).

We can rejoice and honor the Cross because we know how the story ends. The Introit verse for today's Mass says, "We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection."

The Paschal Mystery is that Jesus' death and resurrection are mysteriously united. The Easter Sequence puts it this way: *Dux vitae, mortuus, regnat vivus* ("The Prince of Life, though dead, reigns living.")

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you; because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.