

November 21, 2022

5:15 p.m.

St. Thomas More Parish

**Votive Mass of the “Mystery of the Holy Cross” on occasion of blessing new
outdoor Cross**

(Readings from Feast of Exaltation of the Cross: Num. 21:4-9; Phil.2:6-11; Jn. 3:13-17)

This passage contains (by most Scripture Scholars judgement) the greatest message of the Gospel’s Good News, even if many people do not pay attention to it. It communicates the best news the world has ever heard, even though the world continues in so many ways to turn a deaf ear to it. This passage includes the well-known Gospel verse “Jn. 3:16” that is so frequently found on placards and displayed at large sporting events, even though most people may have no idea what it actually signifies.

In these 4 verses, Jesus---the Word made Flesh, the Son of God, the King of the Universe----makes it very clear that our God is NOT a vindictive God; our God did NOT send His Son into the world to condemn it, punish it, or control it. God did not want His Son to “lord it over” humanity, but to become the Lord of all humanity---to be the King of the Universe. God sent His Son into the world for only one reason: to save the world; *“so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life.”*

Or as St. Paul reflected on why Jesus came into the world in today’s beautiful hymn found in his Letter to the Philippians: *“Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped; rather He....humbled Himself becoming obedient to death on a cross. And because of this, God greatly exalted Him....so that every knee should bend...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”*

Jesus told us what true “greatness” is---to be the Servant of all. And the Cross is the sign that Jesus, the Son of God, “emptied Himself”; He poured Himself out totally---down to the last ounce of His Sacred Bodily Blood and Water that gushed forth when the Soldier pierced His side with a lance. And it was that pouring forth of Jesus’ very self that became the Fount of Life in Baptism, and the Food for our Journey of Faith in the Eucharist, that we celebrate here together.

As we celebrate this special Votive Mass of “the Mystery of the Holy Cross” in anticipation of blessing the new Outdoor Cross that overlooks Kalamazoo from the vantage point of St. Thomas More Parish, we do so just after yesterday’s great Celebration of Christ the King, the Feast which culminates the entire Liturgical Year. Perhaps it’s no wonder that the world “turns a deaf ear” to the Good News of the Gospel; that the world doesn’t “pay attention” to the greatest Good News of why Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world. It’s a complete paradox; it makes no logical sense to those who see only with the use of reason.

Even yesterday’s Gospel for Christ the King, the culminating Feast of the Year, shows our King crucified and dying on a Cross, being taunted by the soldiers, sneered at by the religious leaders, and blasphemed by one of the two criminals crucified alongside of Jesus. But as all of that was happening, Jesus focused on the other criminal, the one we know as the Good Thief, promising him that he would that very day be with Him in Paradise.

The Cross makes no sense to those with no Faith; but for us, for those with Faith, the Cross is the Sign of our Salvation. For it was by means of the Holy Cross that Jesus saved all humanity from the power of sin and the lasting impact of death.

So, we’re always faced with the question: when we stand before the Cross, do we do so as “part of the crowd of onlookers”? Or do we do so standing with John, and our Blessed Mother, and the Holy Women---as “part of the faithful disciples”? When we see Jesus with His Arms nailed to the Cross, our Faith challenges us to see those Arms as embracing all of humanity, including their sneers, lack of faith, and rejections; and including each of us with our own sinfulness, weakness, and failures. Jesus embraced it all---He embraced us all.

That is what St. Paul means by saying that “*He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave*”---even lower than a slave. We need to realize---this (the Cross) is what it took for Jesus to accomplish our Salvation. So, when we look at the Cross, we need to allow ourselves to be gathered into Jesus’ Saving Embrace, and in the process, to humble ourselves in acknowledgement of our ongoing sins and failings, so that Jesus can exalt us through His Love and Mercy. When we look at the Cross, and see ourselves standing with the Disciples, then we are called to follow Jesus in the ongoing process of building His Kingdom here in this world. If Jesus is the King of the world, then we must also allow Him to be the King---the Lord---of our lives. We must constantly look to the Cross, begging for the Grace to be transformed by Jesus’ Saving Love, and through the Grace of the

Sacraments, and in particular through the Strength of the Holy Eucharist, that we continue to do what we need to do to live our lives in holiness, to be joyful witnesses to this Good News of the Gospel to any and all in the world who will hear it, and to proclaim with all that we do and in every word that we say: *“Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*