

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

(Numbers 21, 4b-9; Philippians 2, 6-11; John 3,13-37)

Excerpts of Pope Francis – Angelus & Homily - 29 SEPT 2014

By Father Charles Fillion

14 September 2025

Brothers and sisters, on 14 of September the Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Some **non**-Christians might ask: why “exalt” the Cross? We can respond that we do not exalt **any** cross whatsoever or **all** crosses: we exalt *the Cross of Jesus*, because in it God’s love for humanity was fully revealed.

That’s what the Gospel of John reminds us: “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son” (3:16). The Father “**gave**” the Son to save us, and this resulted in the **death** of Jesus, and **his** death on the **Cross**.

Why? Why was the Cross necessary? Because of the **gravity** of the evil which enslaved us. The Cross of Jesus expresses **both** things: all the negative forces of evil, and all of the gentle power of God’s mercy.

The Cross would seem to decree Christ’s failure, but in reality, it signals His victory. On Calvary, those who mocked him said to him: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (cf. Mt 27:40). But the opposite was true: it was precisely because Jesus was the Son of God, that He was there, on the Cross, faithful to the end to the loving plan of the Father. And for this very reason God “exalted” Jesus (Phil 2:9), giving universal kingship on Him.

When we look to the Cross where Jesus was nailed, we contemplate the sign of love, of the infinite love of God for each of us and the source of our salvation. The mercy of God, which embraces the whole world, springs from the Cross. Through the Cross of Christ, the Evil One is overcome, death is defeated, life is given to us, hope is restored. This is important: through the Cross of Christ hope is restored to us.

The Cross of Jesus is our **one** true hope! That is why the Church “exalts” the Holy Cross, and why we Christians bless ourselves with the sign of the cross. That is, we don’t exalt crosses, but **the** glorious Cross of Christ, the sign of God’s immense love, the sign of our salvation **and** path toward the Resurrection. This is our hope.

While we contemplate and celebrate the Holy Cross, we think of so many of our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted and killed because of their faith in Christ. This happens especially wherever religious freedom is still not guaranteed or fully realized. It happens, however, even in countries and areas which, in principle, protect freedom and human rights but where, in practice, believers, and especially Christians, encounter restrictions and discrimination. So today we remember them and pray for them in a special way.

On Calvary, there at the foot of the Cross, was the Virgin Mary (cf. Jn 19:25-27). She is Our Lady of Sorrows. To her we entrust the present and the future of the Church, so that we may all **always** be able to discover and welcome the message of love and salvation of the Cross of Christ.

In today's first reading, the people journey through the desert. We can imagine them as they walked, led by Moses; they were families: fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, grandparents, men and women of all ages, accompanied by many children and the elderly who struggled to make the journey. They remind us of the Church as she makes her way across the desert of the contemporary world, reminding us of the People of God is composed, for the most part, of families.

This makes us think of families, **our** families, walking along the paths of life with all their day-to-day experiences. It is impossible to quantify the strength and depth of humanity contained in a family: mutual help, educational support, relationships developing as family members **mature**, the sharing of joys and difficulties. Families are the first place in which we are formed as persons and, at the same time, the "bricks" for the building up of society.

At a certain point, "the people became impatient on the way" (Num 21:4). They are tired, water supplies are low and all they have for food **is manna**, which, although plentiful and sent by God, seems far too miserable in a time of crisis. Poisonous serpents come and bite the people, and many die. This causes the people to repent and to turn to Moses for forgiveness, asking him to beg to God so that he will cast out the snakes. Moses prays to the Lord, and the Lord offers a remedy: a bronze serpent set on a pole; whoever looks at it will be saved from the deadly poison of the vipers.

What is the meaning of this symbol? God does **not** destroy the serpents, but rather offers an "antidote": by means of the bronze serpent fashioned by Moses, God transmits his healing strength, namely his mercy, which is more potent than the Tempter's poison. Jesus identifies himself with this symbol: out of love the Father "has given" his only begotten Son so that men and women might have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:13-17). Such immense love of the Father spurs the Son to become man, to become a servant and to die for us upon a cross. Out of such love, the Father raises up his son, giving him dominion over the entire universe. Whoever entrusts himself to Jesus crucified receives the mercy of God and finds healing from the deadly poison of sin.

Yes, let us exalt *the Cross of Jesus*, and give thanks to our God. Amen.