



# LIVING THE GOSPEL

## The Exaltation Of The Holy Cross. September 14<sup>th</sup> 2025

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**Theme: "The Son of Man must be lifted up...so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life."**

### **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** O God, who willed that your Only Begotten Son should undergo the Cross to save the human race, grant, we pray, that we, who have known his mystery on earth, may merit the grace of his redemption in heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Exploring the Word**

#### **Gospel Reading: John 3:13-17**

<sup>13</sup> No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven; and the Son of Man must be lifted up <sup>14</sup> as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

<sup>16</sup> Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

#### **Gospel Focus**

This can feel like an odd feast; we raise up and exalt an instrument of torture, the means of our Savior's death. However, it is not about the cross itself; it is about the whole story, the love story of God never giving up on humanity. God's love is self-emptying and life-giving; God enters into human life, enduring even suffering and death, in order to unite us with God. The love is the thing that makes the cross beautiful. It transforms it from a death-dealing device to a sign of hope. If God can make this transformation happen, truly anything is possible for God.

#### **Gospel Reflection**

Today's gospel reading is taken from Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin who was interested in Jesus' teaching. In the middle of this dialogue, Jesus says that the Son of Man must be "lifted up" like the serpent in the desert, referring to his own forthcoming crucifixion.

On this feast, we rejoice in the cross of Jesus, but it should at least give us a momentary pause to be celebrating a Roman torture device. In the centuries since Jesus lived, died, and rose, the cross has become almost entirely sanitized in Western culture. In some quarters the cross is as much a brand as anything else on the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, or the

technology we keep in our pockets. Our society loves to “lift things up”: wealth, status, power, and so on. In this context, the cross becomes yet another aesthetic symbol, and we become mere “influencers.” We forget the gravity of the matter enough to see a crucifix and glance away, thinking to ourselves, “Oh that is nice, maybe I’ll order a cross necklace on Amazon.” In truth, what Jesus says must be “lifted up” is instead most ugly, most unseemly and most homely. It is not a golden calf, nor an army’s standard, nor a brand logo, but the bloodied and broken God-man, fastened to a piece of wood.

But that is exactly as Jesus desires. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians that Jesus “did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” The last indeed shall be first, beginning with God himself. As he is “lifted up” on the cross, Jesus’ descent to our human condition reveals everything that it is to be God for us: the totality of self-emptying love, broken and shared. In the St John’s Bible depiction of the crucifixion scene, both cross and Christ are pure gold, the total revelation of God’s very self, shown against a cosmic background—this is an event that resounds through all time and space. By the love of Christ outpoured, the atrocity of the crucifixion becomes something profoundly beautiful. The cross is no longer simply an instrument of death, but has become the means by which we are given abundant life.

In this courageous act of love, we find reason for hope and decisive direction for our own life. We have no reason to fear either life or death, as God’s redeeming love is enough for us. As was the case with the serpent in the desert, “lifted up” for all to look upon in search of healing, we are offered wholeness and redemption in gazing upon the cross. However, in turning to the cross, we also must recognize Jesus’ destiny as our own. We too must be “lifted up” with Christ, born from above in baptism and thus united with him in his death and resurrection. If we love as Christ loves, we will not escape from our own crosses. In celebrating the Holy Cross, we praise Jesus for his saving love, but we also must heed his call: deny [your] self and take up [your] cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23)

### **Old/New Testament and CCC links**

#### **First Reading – Numbers 21:4-9**

<sup>4</sup> They left Mount Hor by the road to the Sea of Suph, to skirt round Edom. On the way the people lost patience. <sup>5</sup> They spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? For there is neither food nor water here; we are sick of this meagre diet.'

<sup>6</sup> At this, God sent fiery serpents among the people; their bite brought death to many in Israel. <sup>7</sup> The people came and said to Moses, 'We have sinned by speaking against Yahweh and against you. Intercede for us with Yahweh to save us from these serpents.' Moses interceded for the people, <sup>8</sup> and Yahweh replied, 'Make a fiery serpent and raise it as a standard. Anyone who is bitten and looks at it will survive.'

<sup>9</sup> Moses then made a serpent out of bronze and raised it as a standard, and anyone who was bitten by a serpent and looked at the bronze serpent survived

#### **Responsorial Reading – Psalm 77:1-2, 34-38**

##### ***R: Do not forget the works of the Lord. (R)***

Hearken, my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter mysteries from of old. **(R)**

While he slew them, they sought him and inquired after God again.  
Remembering that God was their rock and the Most High God, their redeemer. **(R)**

But they flattered him with their mouths and lied to him with their tongues,

Though their hearts were not steadfast toward him nor were they faithful to his covenant. **(R)**

But he, being merciful, forgave their sin and destroyed them not; Often he turned back his anger and let none of his wrath be roused. **(R)**

### **Second Reading – Philippians 2:6-11**

<sup>6</sup> (Jesus Christ) Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. <sup>7</sup> But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, <sup>8</sup> he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; <sup>10</sup> so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### **Catechism of The Catholic Church**

**219.** God's love for Israel is compared to a father's love for his son. His love for his people is stronger than a mother's for her children. God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved; his love will be victorious over even the worst infidelities and will extend to his most precious gift: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."(*Jn* 3:16; cf. *Hos* 11:1; *Isa* 49:14-15; 62:4-5; *Ezek* 16; *Hos* 11)

**444.** The Gospels report that at two solemn moments, the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Christ, the voice of the Father designates Jesus his "beloved Son".(Cf. *Mt* 3:17; cf. 17:5) Jesus calls himself the "only Son of God", and by this title affirms his eternal pre-existence.(*Jn* 3:16; cf. 10:36) He asks for faith in "the name of the only Son of God".(*Jn* 3:18) In the centurion's exclamation before the crucified Christ, "Truly this man was the Son of God",(*Mk* 15:39) that Christian confession is already heard. Only in the Paschal mystery can the believer give the title "Son of God" its full meaning.

**458.** The Word became flesh so *that thus we might know God's love*: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."(*1 Jn* 4:9) "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."(*Jn* 3:16)

**679.** Christ is Lord of eternal life. Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to him as redeemer of the world. He "acquired" this right by his cross. The Father has given "all judgment to the Son".(*Jn* 5:22; cf. 5:27; *Mt* 25:31; *Acts* 10:42; 17:31; *2 Tim* 4) Yet the Son did not come to judge, but to save and to give the life he has in himself.(Cf. *Lk* 21:12; *Jn* 15:19-20) By rejecting grace in this life, one already judges oneself, receives according to one's works, and can even condemn oneself for all eternity by rejecting the Spirit of love.(Cf. *Jn* 3:18; 12:48; *Mt* 12:32; *1 Cor* 3:12-15; *Heb* 6:4-6; 10:26-31)

### **Sharing and Discussion**

1. John 3:16 says, 'God so loved the world so much...'How would you describe your current relationship and love for Christ? Is it a relationship of active trust and intimacy, or more of a distant acquaintance?

2. Jesus says that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." What does it mean to you personally to believe in Jesus? Does this belief shape your everyday choices and actions?

3. How does the promise of eternal life influence your view of suffering, challenges, and death? How does this hope sustain you in your daily life?

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** God of Moses, hear our prayers this day. Grant us the strength to witness to your love and the healing we need to continue our journey toward you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen.