The Exaltation of the Holy Cross – 24th Sunday in O.T. 2025

Jesus, standing before Pilate, said, *“I was born for this, I came into the world for this; to bear witness to the truth”.* Pilate, dismissively retorted, *“Truth? What is that?” (John 18:37-38)*. Not recognising that “Truth” was standing before him, Pilate released Barabbas, sent Jesus out to be scourged, and crowned with thorns, and finally, he passed judgement, *“Take him yourselves and crucify him” (John 19:6).*

We solemnly commemorate these events on Good Friday, when the cruelty and ugliness of the Cross dominate that day. We look upon the visual suffering of Jesus, and see the nails, the scourged, bloodied and broken body. But today’s feast, that of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, has an entirely different emphasis – today we are to look beyond the ugliness of the Cross, and to see something astounding – to see beauty! When we look at the Cross, do we behold the beauty of love, love that does not count the cost? Those who gaze with faith and trust, on the crucified Jesus, see something truly astounding: they see what God's love looks like! *“God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost.”*

This was the truth that Pilate was blind to, the truth that many in our world also cannot see. But we, men and women of faith, can see the unbounded love which did not count death too high a price to pay. This is the beauty which shines out from the Cross.

It was the beauty of infinite love that caused that great mystic of the fourteenth century, St Catherine of Siena to exclaim: *“The Cross would not have been enough to hold him, nor the earth enough to keep the Cross upright, nor the nails enough to keep him nailed fast to the Cross, unless love had held him there first!”*…….*What indescribable love! By his death he has given us life......we have nothing to fear.”* *(Letter T)*

In every Mass, immediately after the words of consecration, the priest declares, “The mystery of faith!” St Catherine of Siena, in a few simple words tells us what the mystery of faith is: “by his death he has given us life!”

Today’s Gospel passage declares, *“The Son of Man must be lifted up”* – it is obviously a reference to the crucifixion, but it is then followed by an intriguing remark, *“as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert...”*  It brings us back to that time when, for forty years, Moses and the Israelites wandered in the desert. At one point, the people felt they had endured enough, and they rebelled against God. This rebellion resulted in a punishing plague of vicious serpents, which by their poisonous bites, caused the death of many. The people quickly repented and implored Moses to beg God to remove the plague. Moses, instructed by God, made a serpent out of bronze and raised it on a pole for all to see. Those bitten by a serpent, who, with faith and trust in God, looked at the bronze serpent, were healed. Thus, the symbol of death became a symbol of life.

Now it is the crucified Jesus who has become for us the source of healing and life. The Gospel, in recalling the story of Moses and the serpents, challenges us to humbly acknowledge our own rebellion against God, and the venomous bite of sin from which we all suffer. On the Cross, we see the result of sin - Jesus crucified by those whose hearts were poisoned with hatred – and he continues to be crucified today, in those who are cruelly tortured, abused and maimed, by those who, *“have shown they prefer darkness to the light.”*

In this troubled world of ours, the Cross is the silent witness that, not even its barbarity, could induce God to tire of loving humanity; rather it became God's eternal heart-rending cry of love *– “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son”.*

Just as the people in Moses' time couldn't heal themselves from the serpent's bites but had to look with faith to the symbol of God's healing power, we too, with faith, must look to Jesus crucified, and accept the gift of his love. He is the divine physician, and we the sick. He comes to heal. His is the medicine of love.”

May that healing balm transform us and waken us to a new way of living. Believing in Jesus is not merely assenting to dogmas but living by loving. It is then that we begin to understand Jesus’ words, *“I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger, and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me.”* We realise what he meant when he said*, “when you did it to the least, you did it to me”.* In so living we witness to the “Truth”.

*“*We adore you, O Christ,

and we bless you,

because by your holy Cross

you have redeemed the world”. **Amen.**