

Tuesday 14th September 2021

TUESDAY 24th WK ORDINARY TIME – YR 1



The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

First Reading

Nm 21:4-9

A reading from the book of Numbers

When those that were afflicted looked upon it, they were healed.

On the way through the wilderness, the Israelites lost patience. They spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is neither bread nor water here; we are sick of this unsatisfying food.'

At this God sent fiery serpents among the people; their bite brought death to many in Israel. The people came and said to Moses, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Intercede for us with the Lord to save us from these serpents.' Moses interceded for the people, and the Lord answered him, 'Make a fiery serpent and put it on a standard. If anyone is bitten and looks at it, he shall live.' So Moses fashioned a bronze serpent which he put on a standard, and if anyone was bitten by a serpent, he looked at the bronze serpent and lived.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 77:1-2. 34-38. R. v.7

(R.) Do not forget the works of the Lord!

1. Give heed, my people, to my teaching;
turn your ear to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable
and reveal hidden lessons of the past. **(R.)**
2. When he slew them then they would seek him,
return and seek him in earnest.
They would remember that God was their rock,
God the Most High their redeemer. **(R.)**
3. But the words they spoke were mere flattery;
they lied to him with their lips.
For their hearts were not truly with him;
they were not faithful to his covenant. **(R.)**
4. Yet he who is full of compassion
forgave their sin and spared them.
So often he held back his anger
when he might have stirred up his rage. **(R.)**

Second Reading

Phil 2:6-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians

He humbled himself, therefore God had exalted him.

The state of Jesus was divine,
yet he did not cling
to his equality with God
but emptied himself
to assume the condition of a slave,
and became as men are;
and being as all men are,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death,
death on a cross.
But God raised him high
and gave him the name
which is above all other names
so that all beings
in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
should bend the knee at the name of Jesus
and that every tongue should acclaim
Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel

Jn 3:13-17

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

The Son of Man must be lifted up.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

'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
as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.
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.
For God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved.'

Reflection - Fr John Lovell

Today is the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

It is interesting how Jesus compared Himself and the crucifixion He would suffer with the Old Testament scene of Moses telling the Israelites to look at the bronze serpent raised up on a standard to heal them of their snake bites.

What Moses had done at God's orders must have seemed utterly outrageous to the Israelites, as they'd previously been told by God to have nothing to do with graven images: images of living things that pagans worshipped. Another thing that made this thing doubly shocking was that involved the image of a serpent, the very creature they believed had tempted Adam and Eve to sin against God in the Garden of Eden. Thus, to them it was a symbol of evil. Yet, Jesus on the cross would also look like something evil, like a despicable criminal being punished for his sins.

Unlike today, in the early Christian Church the Crucifixion of Jesus was rarely depicted in sacred art. Why? Because it was confronting, hideous and scandalous. Plus, it was not a positive way of attracting new converts to the faith at that time. In the catacombs in Rome, the predominant image of Jesus was that of the Good Shepherd or the symbolic pictogram of the fish. Too many people were still being subject to horrific Roman punishments, including crucifixion, for a crucified Christ to be an appealing way of drawing new people to the faith. The Apostle Paul, however, insisted on the importance of preaching a crucified Christ, since that single act was key to our salvation.

Then, very soon after Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD, his mother St Helena went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in search of the sacred relics of Jesus's passion, including the cross on which He died. Excavations in Jerusalem uncovered three buried crosses, one which brought instant healing to a dying woman when she touched it. Accordingly, this was deemed to be the Cross of Jesus. This cross was broken up and fragments of it were distributed to various parts of the newly Christianized Roman empire. Small fragments of the true Cross, along with other relics (including a nail from the Crucifixion and the sign that hung over the Lord's head) can today be seen in the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, which is only a short walk from the Basilicas of Saint John Lateran and Scala Santa (which contains the 28 marble steps Jesus ascended in Jerusalem to face trial before Pontius Pilate).

Since the time of Saint Helena, the image of the Cross, once a feared object of suffering and death, like the bronze serpent Moses raised up in the desert, has brought new life to people around the world who look to it with faith. Each time we bless ourselves, we identify with the Cross of Christ, since the Cross is our glory.