

# 24<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Luke 15:1-32

This week we celebrate Holy Cross Week in honour of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross—one of our parish's feast days and the anniversary of our parish. The feast itself commemorates the finding of the True Cross in A.D. 326 by St. Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, during a pilgrimage she made to Jerusalem. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was then built at the site of the discovery, by order of Helena and Constantine and dedicated on 14 September, A.D. 335, with a part of the True Cross inside. In A.D. 614, that portion of the Cross was carried away from the church by the Persians, and remained missing until it was recaptured and returned by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius in A.D. 629.

We celebrate the Holy Cross because it is the instrument of our salvation. The instrument used to kill our Lord who, in obedience to His Father and for love of us, accepted His death. That acceptance of death meant that the greatest good, Christ, confronted the greatest evil, death, and destroyed it. It is ironic that by Christ's death he destroyed death but that is because evil through all it could against God, it shot its silver bullet, death, and death lost. It lost because Christ was raised to life, showing that the best evil had was as nothing compared to the power of God.

During Israel's march from Egypt to the Promised Land, God permitted—because of the ingratitude of the people—a plague of poisonous snakes, as a result of which many died. When the others understood their sin they asked Moses to intercede before God. So Moses prayed and was told by the Lord: "Make a fiery serpent and put it on a standard. If anyone is bitten and looks at it, he shall live." (*Num.* 21:8). Moses set up the bronze serpent as a standard that became salvation from death for anyone who was bitten by the serpents.

In the Book of Genesis the serpent was a symbol of the spirit of evil. But now, by a startling reversal, the bronze serpent lifted up in the desert was a symbol of healing—just as is the figure of Christ lifted up on the Cross.

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross makes present to us the lifting up of Christ on the Cross. This feast is the lifting up of the saving Christ, that whoever believes in the Crucified One has eternal life. The lifting up of Christ on the Cross gives a beginning to the lifting up of humanity through the Cross.

In our most difficult times we look at the cross with Our Lord hanging in agony as he slowly died and we realise that what we suffer is not a punishment of God. Because if the Father allows His own son to suffer such agony then it is not that God has abandoned us but rather He is close to us. Whatever pain we suffer, it has already been endured by God in Christ. We do not suffer anything that Christ Himself did not suffer. That means that suffering is not punishment but a consequence of the fallen world in which we all live and that our fallen world has not been abandoned by God but, instead, from the very moment of our fall, God intervened to draw us back to Himself and to the life He had always intended for us to live. In the end, however, it took the death of His Son to completely and utterly do away with evil. Because on that cross God in Christ shouted to all the world, through all ages and all places: “Enough is enough! It ends here and it ends now in me!” And while we still know great anguish and pain and suffering, it is not an end in itself but a way to an end, which, in Christ, means freedom. Suffering never lasts forever, even if it brings about the death of someone. Because by the Holy Cross God destroyed death so that not even death is final.

Every Catholic home should have a crucifix hanging on its walls; that sign of salvation, so that in our pain we can look upon that cross and, just as the Hebrews looked on the golden serpent, see in that figure of pain and death, that figure of freedom and everlasting life.