

Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross

In exploring the history of this feast I discovered two reasons it came to be. First, it celebrates the building (and several rebuildings) of churches over the sites of Jesus' death and his burial place. Second, it recalls a pilgrimage of St. Helena in which artifacts of the crucifixion were recovered and brought back to Rome.

In addition, I came across a homily by Fr. Richard Rohr that goes right to the heart of this feast, and is highly incorporated in this message. I want to acknowledge Fr. Rohr, as is proper.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross. To exult means to feel and express extreme joy and celebration in a victory. It's an overwhelming feeling of happiness in an achievement. So where's the achievement or victory in a cross – ***an excruciating instrument of death!***

To help understand, imagine something that you see every day and probably never pay any attention too. As you drive along the streets, every now and then, you see these big transformers on a telephone pole.

Now I'm not an electrician, but I know this much, the the voltage comes in at a dangerously high level, it's unusable, its destructive. And whatever happens in that big gray box the electricity is transformed and is returned safe and usable. Keep that in mind, because that's the victory of the Cross. Something dangerous comes in and it's transformed, its changed, and not returned in the same way.

Now in the first reading we heard the first indication of this. The people of Israel are going through the desert and found themselves being bitten by snakes. Moses talks to God and then does a strange thing. He puts a bronze snake on a pole and tells the people that whoever looks at it will be saved.

Now what's that all about? What is going on? Well what's happening is similar to a what happens when you get a vaccine. You give a person just enough of the disease so that their body can overcome it. You give a person just enough of the disease to recognize they have a problem and that shocks them into the solution. So the very snake that bit them is the snake that saves them. That's the mystery of the Cross!

You see, Jesus hanging on the cross accepts the cruelty, the brutality, the sheer callousness that our world offers God, and he does not return it in kind. He's the victim but... he does not create victims back. "Father forgive them they don't know what they're doing." That's a high level of; life, love, forgiveness, trust - to be able to say that.

So what does that mean to you and me? It means, every time someone talks about you unkindly or maybe dishonestly - if you do the same thing to them you have missed the victory of the cross! You just missed your opportunity, you didn't transform it, instead, you stooped to the same level.

When someone does something malicious to you, undeserved, unfair - and you, by the grace of God, can find the love, the heart, the freedom, to not do the same thing back... then at that moment, you are enjoying the victory of the Cross. That's what it means!

Now that said, most Christians are pretty much just like everybody else. We worship the cross as if it's a nice, holy, Christian symbol. But the mystery of the cross, the victory of the cross, it's still somewhere out there. Jesus did it - we thank him for it, but it hasn't transformed us. We don't understand that we don't need to hate back when we're hated. We don't need to do bad things to other people when they do bad things to us.

But how often are we like that? Most of us respond with an immediate knee jerk reaction - someone talks about us - we talk about them. And we've just missed the Cross. You see, it is a crucifixion, it hurts - it's death to your own self, its painful. It's death to your own ego, its humiliating. That's what makes, or should make the Christian people, an entirely different species - because we don't operate the way almost all the world operates.

Yet, look at the news today. It's all about who killed who and how can we kill them back - as if that's gonna advance any good in the world. The only people who advance good in the world, who reveal God in the world - are the people who join Jesus on the cross ***to stop the madness!***

At a rational, practical, common sense level – this makes absolutely no sense - just like the cross didn't make a bit of sense. But sooner or later each of us who keep signing ourselves with this cross have to make a decision - does this mean anything, or is it just a symbol that we belong to the Christian group.

You see, we've been invited into the mystery of transformation. We're invited to realize that life comes into you at a deadly level. It accuses you; it betrays you; it abandons you; it talks about you; and you - by the grace of God - are the ones who don't have to give it back.

Imagine what it be like if all of us were a transformed people? Because that's what it means to be signed by the cross. That's the exaltation of the cross - There is no other victory. And when, we find in our heart, in our mind, and in our very body... the freedom, to not have to hate back the people who hate you... then in fact we are liberated. We are saved!

We're saved from the ridiculous, infantile, unending ways of this world which only continue the problem. Because in you - God has begun the solution. That's the victory worth celebrating! That's the achievement in this Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross.

May we be transformed through the realization of how Jesus' salvation truly works -

In the name of... +