

SEPTEMBER 14 - THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS
9-14-2025 Homily.

I. Introduction

A Catholic church in downtown Minneapolis, Annunciation Parish, is currently undergoing its own experience of Good Friday. It was there that, on Wednesday August 27, a deranged and violent young man began shooting at the church's windows from outside on the parking lot. The church was filled with students attending an all-school Mass to mark the beginning of a new school year. Two children were killed: an 8-year-old boy named Fletcher, and a 10-year-old girl named Harper. Seventeen other students, and three adults, were injured; one of the children, a 12-year-old girl named Sophia, is in critical condition, and may not make it. Needless to say, many of the survivors are traumatized, and their lives will never be the same.

Whenever an act of violence occurs inside a Catholic church, the building has to be formally reconsecrated—a form of spiritual cleansing—before Mass can be held there again. Therefore, the following Saturday, the parish held its first weekend Mass after the tragedy in the school gymnasium. The archbishop of Minneapolis concelebrated the liturgy, and people from across the archdiocese came to support the grieving parish community—crying, hugging, and consoling one another. During his homily, the pastor—Father Dennis Zehren—noted that when the shooting began, people shouted, “Down, down, get down; get low and stay down.” Then he preached these inspired words: “But when we were down there, in that low place, Jesus showed us something. He showed us, ‘I am the Lord even here. I am the One Who descended into hell. I am the One Who had taken on all the darkness and evil in this world, all the forces of darkness and death and evil.’ Jesus pointed and He said, ‘Can’t you see how weak [hatred] is? Can’t you see how desperate it is? Can’t you see that this can never last? Can’t you see that this is not why God created us?’ Then He showed us. He began to show us a light. It’s a new light. The light of a new day is breaking. We watch for that light of a new day. . . . It reminds us, when death and darkness have done their worst, that’s when God says, ‘Now see what I will do.’”

Father Zehren’s words from two weeks ago not only helped a broken-hearted community begin to find hope and healing; they also speak to today’s feast. The Church refers to this celebration not as the Tragedy of the Holy Cross or the Defeat of Christ on the Holy Cross, but rather as the Exaltation or Triumph of the Holy Cross. The joy of Jesus’ glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday was only possible because of the horror and agony of Good Friday. God is always able—often in ways we can’t understand—to bring good out of evil. Moreover, He does this not from “up there” in a far-off Heaven, but down here, with and next to and among and within us. The Cross of Jesus is a reminder and promise that God knows first-hand His children’s sorrow and pain. He is with us, and that’s why—even in the midst of tragedy and grief—we have a well-founded hope of healing, peace, and new life.

II. Development

Today’s readings proclaim a message of hope; the focus is not so much on the sufferings Our Lord endured on the Cross, but on His victory over sin and death. Jesus was like that bronze serpent in the 1st Reading lifted up to save those bitten by a real serpent, a symbol of

evil; as He says in the Gospel, all who look upon Him with faith will be saved. This is God's plan; this is why He allowed the horrible tragedy and injustice of Good Friday to occur—for He knew it would make possible the history-changing and miraculous event of Christ's Easter Sunday Resurrection. As St. Paul says in the 2nd Reading, because Jesus trusted completely in His Father and fully surrendered Himself to God's Will, He is now greatly exalted—and all who truly follow Him will one day share in His glory.

III. Conclusion

This wonderful promise is perhaps more important now than ever before in our lifetimes. The number of violent attacks in our country on Catholic churches, and other Christian houses of worship, has set record highs. Some of these attacks have merely been acts of youthful vandalism or misbehavior, which are themselves inexcusable and bad enough, but many have demonstrated a malicious and outright rejection of God and hatred toward His people. Furthermore, despite the efforts of the current presidential administration to protect the religious freedom of all Americans, society as a whole—and sometimes government agencies and local officials—have manifested an increasing and unyielding intolerance and hostility toward religious believers. We, in some small way, are beginning to share the experiences of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world. We've not yet reached the point of having our church buildings confiscated or bulldozed, as happens in China; or risking the possibility of imprisonment or execution because of our faith in Jesus, as occurs in many Muslim nations; or having to fear the murder of our families and fellow parishioners, as is taking place in various nations in Africa. Rather, the threat we may very well face in the future is one of a bloodless or "white" martyrdom, in which we risk fines, imprisonment, and societal mockery, condemnation, or rejection if we take our faith in Christ seriously—a situation already existing in Canada, Great Britain, and various other formerly Christian countries. Furthermore, there's always a chance that we personally may be affected by what seems to be a rising tide of violence across America.

No matter what happens, however, the Cross is the promise that Jesus is with us, and an utterly reliable reminder that He is victorious and rules forever in glory. If there were no resurrection to eternal life for the righteous, the tragedies that have occurred in Minneapolis and elsewhere would mean that evil has won and that God was no longer in charge of His creation; if Jesus had not Himself freely suffered a cruel and unjust death, our own sufferings and losses would overwhelm us and leave us forever defeated. However, that is not the case, and it never will be. Because the Lord knows first-hand what it is to grieve and suffer and die, we are never alone in our suffering and distress; He unites our own experiences of sorrow and doubt and pain to all that He suffered on Good Friday, so that we may also share in the rejoicing of Easter Sunday. Until that day of final victory comes, God invites us to pray for all the victims of hatred and violence, to pray that all persecuted Christians will remain firm in their faith, and to pray for the conversion and salvation of their persecutors and all who would do them harm. Despite all appearances to the contrary, Jesus has won the victory, His Cross is triumphant, and the coming of His Kingdom is assured. In the midst of sorrow, doubt, and fear, let us continue to proclaim: "The Lord has done great things for us; holy is His Name."