

Exaltation of the Cross

September 14, 2025 (Sunday)

St. Edward's Parish

Friends, the Church today celebrates the Exultation of the Holy Cross. This feast day always occurs on September 14th and when it happens to fall on a Sunday it takes priority over the usual Sunday Mass in Ordinary Time. Standing behind the origin of this Feast Day are three historical events.

The first is the finding of the True Cross by St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine and a devout Christian. Around the year 326 she made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and located the site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus along with the True Cross. A story that has been handed down recalls that three Crosses were discovered (Jesus and the two thieves). To determine which was the Cross of Christ, a gravely ill woman was brought and touched with each one. When touched by the True Cross, she was miraculously healed. The next event behind this Feast is when the Emperor Constantine had a church built on the site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus called the Holy Sepulchre. A church still stands on this site today. The construction was finished on September 13th, 335 and the True Cross was brought out for public veneration on September 14th. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross began to be celebrated on this date. Finally, the third event occurred three centuries later in the early 7th century when the Persians conquered Jerusalem and carried away the True Cross. Jerusalem was later rescued by the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, in 629 and the True Cross recovered and restored to Jerusalem. This Feast Day also celebrated that recovery of the Cross. There is a touching story handed down which describes the Emperor, Heraclius, wanting to carry the Cross himself into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. However, as he approached, an invisible force prevented him from proceeding. When he took off his royal robes, crown, and sandals he was able to carry the Cross into the Church. From this time onward, the celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross spread widely throughout the Church.

That was a little background on the development of this Feast Day, but more important than all this is the event of Our Lord's death. While Good Friday contemplates the whole suffering and death of Jesus, the Feast Day today celebrates the Cross itself as the instrument of our salvation.

God is all powerful, therefore, He surely could have saved us by another way if He wanted, perhaps an easier way; however, He chose the Cross. Just one drop of blood from Jesus or one prayer would have been sufficient to save the whole world. Instead, however, He went to the limits of suffering. Through the Cross, God revealed the unimaginable depths of His love for us and His willingness to give everything for us. Jesus on the Cross also showed us the perfect model of virtue: patience, sacrificial love, forgiveness, obedience to God's will, humility, detachment from the world, etc... The Cross shows us the terrible consequences of sin and the ugliness of our disobedience to God. Finally, it shows the power of God to take the worst situation imaginable and transform it into good for us. For such reasons the saints have sung the praises of the Cross. St. Paul wrote: "may I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14)." And St. Francis of Assisi, whenever he was travelling and came upon a Catholic Church, would kneel and say: "*We adore you, O Lord Jesus Christ, in this church and all the churches of the world, and we bless you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*" You may notice that this is the same expression we use when we pray the Stations of the Cross.

Finally, because of Our Lord's death on the Cross, suffering and death no longer have to frighten us. In fact, suffering can become our meeting place with Jesus, the place where we are united to Him. When we suffer illness, misfortune, injustice, failure, or hardships for our faith, we can mysteriously find Him there and share in His Cross. We can even offer our sufferings in union with Him for the salvation of the world. Remember that Our Lord Himself put the Cross at the center of Christian life: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me (Mt 16:24)." As we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross let us pray for the grace not only to love Jesus for His death on the Cross, but also to be willing to embrace our own cross with love as we follow Him. The blessed Virgin Mary will show us the way since no one shared in the sufferings and Cross of Jesus more perfectly than she did.