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Exaltation  
of the  
Cross  
(C)

### "FIRST IMPRESSIONS" EXALTATION OF THE CROSS (A)

SEPT. 14, 2025

**Numbers 21:4b-9; Psalm 78;**  
**Philippians 2: 6-11; John 3: 13-17**  
by **Jude Siciliano**, OP

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(Check the [ARCHIVE](#) for future and past reflections.)

**Dear Preachers:**



Lent begins on Wednesday, February 18, 2026. So why are we celebrating the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in mid-September? Before we turn to today's scripture readings, let's reflect on the feast.

Some history: The feast dates back to the fourth century. Tradition holds that St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, discovered the True Cross in Jerusalem around the year 326, during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This is a very ancient feast, sometimes called the Triumph of the Cross. But unlike Good Friday, which focuses on Christ's suffering,

this feast highlights the victory of the Cross. Through the Cross came salvation and new life for us. Once a symbol of humiliation and execution, it is now a sign of God's love, triumph, and glory.

What is the "glory" of the Cross? Sadly, we have become so accustomed to seeing the Cross—inside and outside churches, on rosaries, around people's necks, even as tattoos, or home décor—that we often miss its deeper meaning. Sometimes it is reduced to a fashion statement or a good-luck charm. Because it is so omnipresent, we can lose the sense of shock it originally evoked—the cruelty and pain it represented.

The first generation of Christians was not blind to the barbaric reality of crucifixion. They had seen their messianic hero tortured, bloodied, mercilessly nailed to a crossbar, and lifted up for all to see and mock. To unbelievers, it was unthinkable that this hated symbol of defeat and death could be cherished as a sign of salvation and a pattern for life.

As followers of Jesus who "exalt" the Cross, we are called to live as witnesses to his life—a life that often stood in contrast to the world. The glory of the Cross is seen in those who follow Christ daily in word and deed. Through his death and resurrection, our lives now show forth his presence in the world.

Our Gospel today comes from the account of Nicodemus' nighttime visit to Jesus, where Jesus explains God's saving plan by recalling Israel's time in the wilderness. The first reading from Numbers presents the scene: the people complain against God and are punished when God sends fiery serpents among them.

When they repent, they are healed by looking upon the bronze serpent Moses lifted up on a pole: "...whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, they lived."

Centuries later, the author of the Book of Wisdom described Moses' bronze serpent as a symbol of salvation. That is why today's reading from Numbers is paired with the Gospel: just as the serpent was lifted up for Israel's healing, so too Jesus is "lifted up" on the Cross so that "everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Today's feast reminds us that discipleship involves embracing the Cross in our own lives. We are encouraged not to glory in worldly power, but in the power of God revealed in weakness. The feast proclaims that suffering and death are not the final word—for through the Cross come resurrection, hope, and glory.

In Israel's tradition, the wilderness was remembered in two ways: as a place of intimacy and covenant with God, and as a place of testing—a test Israel often failed. Today's reading from Numbers highlights that failure.

And yet, how profound and incomprehensible is God's love for us! John proclaims that God's love is total and universal—not limited to a privileged few, not restricted to those who already believe. God's love is for the whole world, so complete that God did not spare even the Son in order to reveal it.

First, God's love was shown in the Incarnation, and then in Christ's saving death: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." John says that God both "gave" and "sent" the Son. "Gave" stresses the generosity of God's gift; "sent" underscores the mission entrusted to Jesus. Either way, we are the beneficiaries of this divine love.

The Cross was the instrument God used to conquer sin and death. By it, the way to God has been opened for us. Through the Cross we die to sin and rise to new life. What a mystery: that what once brought death has become the path to life! No wonder we "exalt" the Cross today.

In his book, "Seasons of Grace: A Spiritual Companion to the Liturgical Year," Walter Kasper reminds us that the Cross does not "prettify" the truth about humanity and our sins (p. 107). It reveals us as we really are and exposes what we do to one another. He calls it the "unvarnished truth"—a truth that, once faced, can set us free.

When we look to the Cross, we confront the difficult truth about human sin. Yet the Cross also reveals the even greater truth of God's mercy: God forgives, reconciles, and saves in love. Instead of condemning humanity, God offers salvation through the Cross.

We live in its shadow. First, it reveals the truth of our lives: we are broken, finite, and unable to save ourselves. But the Cross also reveals the depth of God's mercy and reconciliation—gifts we cannot earn but receive freely through Christ.

A young woman shows off her newly-received engagement ring. A newly married couple wear wedding bands that were blessed and exchanged, along with life-promises, at their wedding ceremony. These material signs are reminders and assurances that they will be there for each other "in good times and in bad." When troubles do arise a glance at the ring serves as a reassurance of a commitment made in love.

The Cross is that for us – a reminder of a promise God made in love with us and was fulfilled when "the Son of Man [was] lifted up." We have not finished our individual desert treks yet and there probably will be lots of missteps before our journey is finished. In the meanwhile, we do not lose hope as we face our shortcomings and the road that still lies in front of us. Lest we get discouraged and fear dropping out along the way, we look to the Cross and the promise of continual help it offers to us. God has given us concrete signs of God's love for us; in Jesus, the Word made flesh and in the Cross which he embraced on our behalf.

**Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:**  
**<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/091425.cfm>**

## **JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD**

### ***The Exaltation of the Holy Cross***



Every one of us, at some point in our lives, will be the sad witnesses to journey with someone in their dying. For me recently, this passage was my beloved husband of 53 years, who crossed over on August 6, 2025.

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We cannot escape the cross but our Lord showed us that it can be full of meaning. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that he who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3: 16). Not only can the cross be full of meaning, but there is also the promise of something abundant in its aftermath. "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a seed, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). In both this Season of Creation and Jubilee Year of Hope, this is a wonderful promise directly from God's Word.

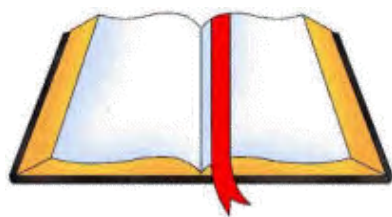
My husband, Chris, had many works of ministry that he quietly pursued over many years. Three of his favorites were Refugee Resettlement, Habitat for Humanity Catholic Coalition, and the Door Fund/Ministry. In Refugee Resettlement, he would help move donated furniture. One time, he and his friend, Jerome, were asked to pick up a sofa only to find it was a sleep sofa. They managed to get it on the truck but vowed to ask next time, "What kind of sofa is being donated?" As a realtor, his

favorite task was to help refugees buy their first homes. After lots of years as part of Habitat teams, he co-founded the Habitat for Humanity Catholic Coalition and loved being an unofficial greeter every working Saturday to make sure everyone got a job to do and that no one felt left out. Always a people-person, the Door Ministry enabled him to speak with those struggling with overdue rent and be a hope for them. Chris carried his loving good nature out to those he could help and was a model of what it means to live the Christian life. You can join in his effort on behalf of these ministries at Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral. It is a beautiful cross to both witness and embrace.

**We** adore you,  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
here, and in all your churches  
throughout the whole world,  
and we bless you,  
for by your holy cross you  
have redeemed the world.  
(Saint Francis of Assisi)

**Barbara Molinari Quinby**, MPS, Director,  
Office of Human Life, Dignity, and Justice Ministries  
**Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral**, Raleigh, NC

## FAITH BOOK



*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "**Faith Book**" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

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### **From today's Gospel reading:**

"For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

### **Reflection:**

We are reminded on this feast to let the grace Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, work within us and transform us, so that we can love human kind as he did...and as God does. "For God so loved the world ...." Our remembering is not simply a calling to mind a past event so we can be filled with guilt, or sympathy or only gratitude.

We remember that the earthy Jesus suffers no more, but the body of Christ in the world continues to suffer. For this is the one who said. "I was hungry, thirsty, imprisoned and naked." The best way to remember Jesus on his cross is to receive his presence at this Eucharist and to serve those in the world who continue to suffer.



## So we ask ourselves:

- As I make the "Sign of the Cross," do I make it in solidarity and remembrance of those who continue to suffer on the many crosses humanity bears...war, exile, sickness, disease, violent death, racism, etc.?
- How can I relieve the cross of someone today?
- Shall I invite Jesus to share with me the particular cross I am carrying at this time in my life?

## POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

*"One has to strongly affirm that condemnation to the death penalty is an inhuman measure that humiliates personal dignity, in whatever form it is carried out."*

---**Pope Francis**

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

### Please write to:

- Henry Wallace #0422350 (On death row since 1/29/1997)
- Terrence Taylor #0539901 (2/18/1997)
- Johnny Parker #0311936 (3/24/1997)

----**Central Prison** P.O. 247 Phoenix, MD 21131

Please note: **Central Prison** is in Raleigh, NC., but for security purposes, mail to inmates is processed through a clearing house at the above address in Maryland.

For more information on the Catholic position on the death penalty go to the Catholic Mobilizing Network: <http://catholicsmobilizing.org/resources/cacp/>

On this page you can sign "The National Catholic Pledge to End the Death Penalty." Also, check the interfaith page for People of Faith Against the Death Penalty: <http://www.pfadp.org/>

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