

# Encouragement Encouragement

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## The Cross: Disgrace or Distinction?

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No, it is not Lent – so why does the Church present us with a great reflection and feast in September, on the Cross, interestingly sandwiched between feast days in honour of Our Lady, her birthday and sorrows? We are bidden to exalt, lift high and keep it in mind and heart. The Cross itself is a symbol of torture, pain and suffering. Of itself it has little to commend it but it is the chosen means by which Jesus died. It is the means by which Jesus offered Himself up to the Father both to redeem us, atone for our sins and carry us to the Father.

On the Cross we see ‘a divine man’ suffer unutterable pain and humiliation, yet remain true to His Mission and obedient to His Father who sent Him to do this, so that we may be bought back and saved.

But, while we rejoice in our Redemption, should we really exalt the Cross? Does all stop at the Cross – clearly not. For it was a dark tunnel that Jesus had to travel so that His True Majesty could be revealed in His Rising.

All the way through the Gospels we have this truth revealed. The Healer is also the Persecuted One, the Miracle Worker is also hounded out of town, the Teacher is ‘corrected’ and mocked. The Man-God hanging on the Cross is told to get off it in order to save Himself. Consistently we have these great paradoxes (contradictions). Even before the Crucifixion Jesus makes reference to the Cross, which again was a forewarning of His death in like manner. I often wonder if the disciples picked this up and understood... He said to them ‘If anyone would come after Me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me’ (Luke 9: 23). He goes on ‘If anyone does not carry his cross and follow Me he cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27).

The cross was a symbol of death – many were put to death in this way. Jesus was reminding them to put to death their own plans, desires and trust Him with their whole selves. Billy Graham makes this point beautifully. Obviously we all have our own trials and

tribulations and the world is full of suffering. Yes we carry these things and we can be transformed by them. Often a life changing event can propel us into taking another course of action. Many great people have used their own ‘crosses’ to understand the suffering of others. ‘Offering up’ our sorrows has long been advocated as a means of surrendering ourselves and moreover calling us to participate in the suffering of Jesus. Few however think of it as the Lord showing us that death leads to life, not only in the ‘travelling on into eternity’ but a way of following the path of Jesus, and being dead to sin, dead to our own desires for fame and fortune, rather than the path chosen for us individually by Father, Son and Spirit.

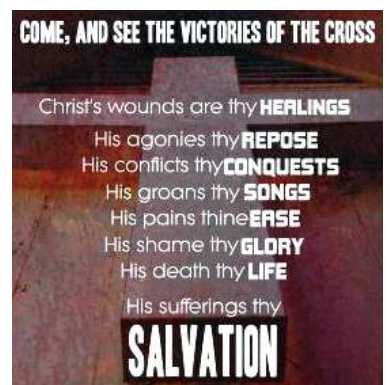
The two cross-beams are a victorious sign of what can be achieved by God’s Grace in a fantastic self-offering extended to us as well as to Jesus.

There have been, or rather are, many reminders of the Cross. We wear them, we adorn our churches with them, there have been countless paintings depicting Jesus on the Cross. These images,

while a blessing, and a reminder, will do little to tell of the purpose, unless we let the Cross become part of our ‘makeup’! We sign ourselves with the Cross, or use the words at the start of a prayer – but do we enter into that saving death.

Because we are frail human beings Jesus gives us reminders of how total His Death and Rising was and of His route to achieve this.

One event in a small town in Northern Spain called Limpias became renowned for this very reason. It is known in Spanish as ‘Santo Christo de Limpias’ after the following events, which took place mostly between 1914 and 1919, (and continued).



Matthew Henry

**Long-lasting victory can never be separated from a long-lasting stand on the foundation of the cross. Watchman Nee**

A large Crucifix above the altar was first seen by a monk to move, as was the head, and blood appeared on Jesus' body. He was not believed, trickery was suspected but a few days later the event was witnessed during Mass by an entire congregation. Sometimes the entire body was seen to convulse. The little town was then visited by politicians, cardinals, priests and lay people alike, and at times exceeded the numbers going to Lourdes.

Over eight thousand accredited witness testimonies were submitted and accepted, written by believers and NON-believers alike.

Clearly rather like Lourdes, so beloved by many, we are free to accept or reject such manifestations. But we should pause to think why we do reject them, and more so, why people are changed by such happenings.

Was it not Saint Francis who heard Jesus speak to him from the Cross, asking him to rebuild His Church. Was it not he who also bore the marks of the nails, the Stigmata, as did St. Padre Pio in the last century? There have been many many more, including St. Catherine of Siena. There have been those who suffered mysteriously the Passion of Jesus – or those like St. Paul of the Cross, who formed a Congregation around Jesus' Passion... the Passionists. These are constant reminders of the Cross that we have to carry as disciples. WE are marked by the Cross.

Sometimes Jesus reveals His Glory – such was the Blessing to Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration, and after His Resurrection, when the Apostles saw the Truth of the Risen Jesus.

We often see the Cross in the heroic suffering of others, and in martyrdom. Today, in some countries it is becoming commonplace, especially in countries such as Syria, Pakistan, Nigeria, and many more. Yet for these 21<sup>st</sup> century martyrs it is not a sign for them of things ending but beginning.

What other symbol has such power to transform, encourage and engender Faith. What other symbol can make satan flee in terror?

*Jesus, by dying on the Cross causes us to Exalt it because His was the transforming victory.*

He made the Cross a symbol of life for all.

The words of the hymn – 'Lift high the Cross' express some of the mystery...

*Lift high the Cross,  
the love of Christ proclaim,  
Till all the world adore His sacred Name.  
So shall our song of triumph ever be:  
Praise to the Crucified for victory.*

No one exalts the Cross more than Mary, Jesus' Mother, as she stood beneath it. Can we exalt and rejoice at His victory, and follow Him?

Halina Holman

#### **POPE FRANCIS**

Jesus did not retain any privilege of being as God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men; he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross". This is also the Christian's path. Indeed, if a Christian wants to make progress on the path of the Christian life, he must lower himself, as Jesus lowered himself: this is the path of humility which means bringing humiliations upon yourself, as Jesus did. The Pope said that this is precisely the message given to us in today's liturgy on this feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Give us the grace that we ask of Our Lady at the foot of the Cross: the grace to cry, to cry out of love, to cry out of gratitude, because our God loved us so much that he sent his Son to lower himself and allow himself to be crushed in order to save us. Rome 14.9.15

#### **Pope Francis Prayer requests for September:**

Evangelisation: Parishes at the service of Mission, 'That our parishes animated by a missionary spirit, may be places where faith is communicated and charity is seen.'

#### **Feasts in September**

4<sup>th</sup> St. Cuthbert,

8<sup>th</sup> **Our Lady's Birthday**

9<sup>th</sup> St. Peter Claver,

12<sup>th</sup> **Most Holy Name of Mary**

13<sup>th</sup> St. John Chrysostom

14<sup>th</sup> **The Exaltation and Triumph of the Cross**

15<sup>th</sup> **Our Lady of Sorrows**

20<sup>th</sup> St. Andrew Kim Tae-Gon and Companions

21<sup>st</sup> St. Matthew, Evangelist

23<sup>rd</sup> St. Padre Pio

26<sup>th</sup> Ss. Cosmos and Damien

27<sup>th</sup> St. Vincent de Paul

28<sup>th</sup> Ss. Lawrence Ruiz & Co.

29<sup>th</sup> Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael

30<sup>th</sup> St. Jerome