

Exaltation of the Cross – September 14, 2025

“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you, fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” You’ll recognize that prayer from every Mass during the Preparation of the Gifts. The same might be said of the Cross. ***Every wooden cross you have seen in churches and chapels and your homes started as a tree; in its own way one of the fruits of the earth, and was shaped by someone’s human hands.*** And though there is absolutely no record of who hewed out the wood that Jesus carried on his shoulders to Calvary, **someone** made that Cross.

I have made a couple of sanctuary crosses over the years – one is at Holy Spirit and one at St. Anthony’s. The St. Anthony’s cross cost me a fingernail when the block of oak for Jesus’s footrest kicked back from the miter saw; and the one at Holy Spirit cost me just a bit of the tip of this finger on the planer. You’d think I’d maybe learn more caution around power tools. But there is just a little of my blood on a board inside that cross at Holy Spirit. Since then, every time I celebrate Mass, I think of those words of Jesus in a deeper way: “This is my Blood, which will be shed for you.” ***I was just careless; He did it out of love.***

Each of you has also been crafting a cross, trying to pattern your life around the faith, hope, and charity revealed in this most central Christian mystery. Every sacrifice you have made; every gesture of kindness and love for family and friend, stranger and opponent; every word and thought of prayer; every act of forgiveness; every moment you said No to self to say Yes to God – ***each of those finds its place, and its infinite value, as fruits of the Cross and the work of human hands.***

History does not record who first invented the gesture we know so well as the Sign of the Cross (+). But it certainly caught on, and it remains the first physical gesture of our faith in Baptism, even before the pouring of the water. That Sign of the Cross is like a brand, ***the mark of the one who has claimed us by his dying and rising*** – not to possess us but to set us free to love as he first loved us. The Cross has not

removed the reality of sin and death from our world, but as St. Leo the Great said so well, Jesus has made them things of time, not eternity. Sin is forgiven, death is changed, the ending of present things becomes the beginning of things to come – peace, healing, glory.

Perhaps the best tribute to the meaning of the Cross I have encountered comes from the Order of Blessing of a Cross for Public Veneration. Look at the Crucifix here over the altar; or perhaps close your eyes and picture one especially meaningful to you, as we hear the Church proclaim what we mean every time we make that Sign of the Cross:

“Blessed are you, Lord God, Father all-holy, for your boundless love. The tree, once the source of shame and death for humankind, has become the cross of our redemption and life. // When his hour had come to return to you in glory, the Lord Jesus, our King, our Priest, and our Teacher, freely mounted the scaffold of the Cross and made it his royal throne, his altar of sacrifice, his pulpit of truth. // On the Cross, lifted above the earth, he triumphed over our age-old enemy. Cloaked in his own blood, he drew all things to himself. // On the Cross, he opened out his arms and offered you his life: the sacrifice of the New Law that gives to the sacraments their saving power. // On the cross, he proved what he had prophesied: the grain of wheat must die to bring forth an abundant harvest. // Father, we honor the Cross as the sign of our redemption. May we reap the harvest of salvation planted in pain by Christ Jesus. May our sins be nailed to his Cross, the power of life released, pride conquered, and weakness turned to strength. // May the Cross be our comfort in trouble, our refuge in the face of danger, our safeguard on life’s journey, until you welcome us to our heavenly home.”

Powerful words indeed. And we respond with gratitude and love with words we know so well from the Stations: *“We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You ... for by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.”*