

**14** Wednesday, September 14  
**Exaltation of  
 the Holy Cross**

**John 3:13-17**

*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. (John 3:14)*

There is a glorious, divine irony in today's feast: a cruel instrument of suffering and death has been transformed into a grace-filled instrument of healing and resurrection.

We see the irony in today's first reading. The Israelites had begun complaining and accusing God of abandoning them during their journey toward the Promised Land. Ultimately, all the venom in their words and hearts manifested itself in the form of poisonous serpents that attacked them. Their own sin fell back upon them and trapped them in death and destruction. That's one irony: the people's complaining made their situation worse.

Then, when the people begged God to save them, he told them to gaze on an image of a serpent. They had to fix their eyes on a symbol of their own sin and unbelief if they wanted to be set free from the consequences of their sin. That's another irony: looking at their sin brought them salvation.

In the Gospel, Jesus promises Nicodemus that the Son of Man

must be "lifted up" so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life (John 3:14). He promises salvation to everyone who comes face-to-face with the consequences of their own sin. Yes, I helped crucify him. It was my own violence, my own hatred, my own self-centeredness and fallen desires that put him up there.

This is the final glorious irony. When we exalt the cross—when we lift it up and gaze on it—we experience God's love and healing. We see that it wasn't just our sin that put Jesus there; it was also his love. It wasn't just our enmity; it was his friendship. It wasn't just our selfishness; it was his selflessness. We thought we were casting him out of our lives when really, he was giving himself to us in the fullest way possible.

Jesus could have stopped his death at any point, but he didn't. He let us lift him up in death so that he could raise us up to eternal life. Let's all exalt the cross in our hearts today.

*"We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your cross you have redeemed the world."*

► **Numbers 21:4-9**

**Psalms 78:1-2, 34-38**

**Philippians 2:6-11**