

From the Pastor

I am very pleased to say that the Parish Picnic was a complete success. Through your powerful prayers, the weather completely cleared by noon offering us a very pleasant outdoor setting. Close to three hundred parishioners came and enjoyed lunch, games, and fellowship. Most of the food was eaten, including the ice cream. Many stayed to clean up the area and put tables and chairs away, completing the task in less than thirty minutes. It was truly a wonderful event that was well attended and enjoyed by all.

The Raffle was also a big success. The final amount collected through the raffle was \$10,615.00. Less the prize money and event expenses the parish general fund gained close to \$7, 600.00. As a fall fundraiser, this years' raffle made more money than the last two festivals we have had.

Thank you to all who bought or sold tickets. Your efforts have made this a successful and positive event. Many thanks are also due to those people who did the planning and legwork for the picnic. Steve Mal, Tim Oparka, and Mel Szlag, were the major players and coordinators, supported by many other helping hands. I am personally grateful for their efforts and initiative that made the day successful. Their commitment to the parish and its life is very evident, and I encourage you to thank them.

Today's feast of the Exaltation of the Cross takes precedence over the twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary time. The feast celebrates the redemptive victory over sin and death won on the Cross of Christ. It originates in the fourth century when the Empress Helena found what was claimed to be the true Cross of Jesus. This relic was discovered on September 14, 320. By 355, a devotion to the Cross had developed and processions and veneration became customary.

Initially, the Cross was seen in its most basic reality: a piece of wood. As devotion and a deeper realization set in, the Cross became a symbol of sacrifice and death, and then a symbol of Christ Himself. Symbols point to and represent reality. More than a symbol, the Cross is the instrument through which our redemption over sin and death is won.

The Cross in all of these expressions is worthy of our reflection. Perhaps taken for granted as an ever familiar sign, it is worthy to ponder the meaning and the purpose of the Cross. The Cross for many has become a popular piece of jewelry. The Crucifix, a cross with the body of Jesus upon it, is also commonly seen in many settings. When used as jewelry or commonly seen, does the Cross stir us to an awareness of its meaning and the love of the God-man who gave his life to us through his death upon it?

The first reading gives good insight into the action and purpose of the Cross. The saraph serpent when lifted on the pole for the people to look at was a sign or symbol of their sin against God. Viewing the symbol of their sin, the people were inspired to repentance and greater reverence for God.

This Old Testament image points to Christ who became the image of our sin 'lifted up' on the Cross. More than a symbol or an image, Jesus became our sin, and was lifted up on the Cross for all to see the salvation God gives to us through the sacrifice of his Son. In 2Cor. 5:21 it is made clear by St. Paul. 'He who did not know sin became sin so that we might know the righteousness of God'.

The Cross is the height of contradiction. It was the instrument of a torturous and humiliating death, only to become the fullness of divine and human glory. God, in Christ, not only accepted our human condition, he also embraced death on the Cross so that we could find new life in him. The divine-human way was to be self-emptying, humble sacrifice, and surrender to suffering for the sake of love. All is gift; unlimited, freely given love and sacrifice, completely initiated by God's desire for us.

In this, the Cross becomes our joy, our hope and our promise. Though an instrument of torture, the Cross of Christ is an altar of sacrifice that conveys to us perfect divine love. Our salvation is not through the suffering of the Cross. The suffering was a consequence of our sin and death, defeated by the power of the love of Christ. Jesus, by his obedience to the Father, reconciles the disobedience of Adam and sets the human race on a new path of freedom that is the love of divine mercy.

Take to heart the ever familiar verse of John 3:16. 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that all who believe in him might not perish, but might have eternal life'. When you are worried and fearful of guilt and sin, look at John 3:17: 'God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him'.

The Cross is your salvation. It is inclusive of all, but is personal to you. Take it personally, to heart. Take your Cross/Crucifix from its place and put it on your lap for ten minutes, and just ponder its meaning and gift for you.

'We adore you, O' Christ and we praise you, because by your Cross you have redeemed the world'.

Father John Esper

