

HOMILY of the EXALTATION of the CROSS – Year C

This Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Thinking about it, I'm reminded of this classic cute story to share with you.

A Jewish couple have a son who is very smart, but a bit troublesome. At the age of five, they send him to a Yeshiva & within a week they hear things aren't going well. After a couple of months they are asked to take him out of school, since he is not setting a good example for the other children.

Things go from bad to worse. They send him to the local public school & by the end of the first semester they are asked to remove him because he has a serious behavior problem. Then they send him away to military school &, to their dismay, there too he is considered incorrigible.

Finally in desperation, the parents take him to the only place left – the local parochial school. A week passes, & then another, & a month goes by & they don't hear anything from the school. There are no complaints about his performance, no reports of trouble. Their curiosity is really aroused when he comes home at the end of the semester with a report card showing three B's & the rest A's. And at the end of the second semester, he has straight A's on his report card, & his performance has been so good that he is the top student in his class.

At last, his mother can contain herself no longer; & she says to him, "Son, what is going on? We send you to the Yeshiva & they throw you out. The public school can't deal with you, & even at military school you were considered incorrigible. But now, with these Catholics, you're not only behaving yourself, you're getting wonderful grades."

"Well, Mama," says the boy, "the truth is that I wasn't impressed by those other places, but the first thing I see when I go into this school is a Jewish guy nailed to a cross & I know it's time for me to get my act together!"

That's how the Cross of Jesus could triumph. Anyway, this Sunday the Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Here is the history of this feast. It celebrates a double anniversary. In Jerusalem, Emperor Constantine built a round church above the empty tomb of Jesus called the Anastasis, a basilica called the Martyrium, & a shrine called Calvarium marking the place of Jesus' crucifixion. They were completed & dedicated in 335; but they were destroyed by the Persians in 614. The two churches were rebuilt by Patriarch Modestus of Jerusalem in 626, but again were destroyed by the Muslims in 1009. The present church of the Holy Sepulcher was rebuilt by the Crusaders & dedicated in 1149. Today also celebrates the discovery of Jesus' Cross by the Empress St. Helena in 320.

First, knowing the history of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, I hope that it will help shed some light into the painful development of our Christian/Catholic Church & get us to appreciate it much more. As you might have known, our Christian/Catholic Church is not perfect. One of the darkest periods in the Church history is the Inquisition. In that period, the Church was accused of forcing people to convert to Christianity at the point of the sword by the Crusaders. Some politicians have exploited this past mistake of our Christian/Catholic Church for their political gain & claimed that the whole Church is culpable of this sin. But, the truth is not that simple. For a problem often takes two to tangle. As we review the history of today's Feast, we can see that the Church faithful had tried to secure & protect sacred items of Christianity such as Jesus' Cross, the site of His Crucifixion, & His Tomb by building shrines & churches at those locations. Unfortunately, Islam & the Muslims have attacked Christians & destroyed those shrines & churches more than once. So, Christians were not the only culprits in the Inquisitions. Islam & the Muslims also played a part in that dark period of human history. In fact, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was dedicated as a Christian museum in presently Turkey; but Islam & the Muslims have turned it into a mosque &

replaced all the Christian icons & statues with their own. The two religions have fought each other for many years.

I'd like to use the history of today's Feast to help educate us on human history & our Christian tradition. Hopefully we would appreciate our Christian faith a lot more & stand up for it. Personally I'm proud of my Catholic faith & everything it has done for me & our world. Catholic priests & nuns have provided education, food supplies, orphanage, & hospital care for countless needy people at low/no cost in the last two thousand years. No government or wealthy individuals have done that for our human family. Our Christian/Catholic Church has done all of that since its beginning because the man on Cross has asked & challenged it to do so. Hopefully we will not let Him down & will look up to his example on the Cross as our encouragement & inspiration every day.

Besides its rich history, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross reminds us of God's unconditional & bountiful love for us. Human history is full of fights, violence, hate, pride, & other sins. For people prefer evil over goodness, darkness over light, hate over love, selfishness over common good, pride over humility, & death over life. But, God has chosen the opposites of human preferences & used the Cross to show us the way out of our vicious cycle of hate & violence. This Sunday's Gospel explains more about the miracle of Jesus' Cross as following, "... Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that all who believe may have eternal life in Him. Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die, but may have eternal life." So, the Cross of Jesus shows us God's love that we do not see a lot in our daily life or throughout our human history. If everyone would do like our Lord did on the Cross, we would have less hate & violence in our world. Everyone would sacrifice themselves for their neighbors & put common good before their own benefits & interests. Hopefully we would look up to the Cross to find comfort in God's love & let that love transform us & the world.

Another spiritual lesson that the Cross of Jesus teaches us is to encourage us to follow a life of virtues. For that way of life will bring out the best in us & help transform our world. That is what Jesus has done for our world. In fact, this Sunday's Second Reading explains more about Jesus' transformative way of life as following, "Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God did not deem equality with God... Rather, He emptied Himself & took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of human beings... He humbled Himself obediently accepting even death, death on the Cross!" So, on the Cross, Jesus showed us how to be humble & generous with His life in order to reconcile us with God the Father & save us.

The last spiritual lesson that today's Feast & the Cross tell us about is to point us to the upcoming victory of His resurrection & the promise of the eternal life for us. Every time we see the Cross of Jesus, we are promised of our own resurrection & a new life in Heaven with Him. The Cross might spell doom & sadness to the world. But, we Christians see it as the bridge to connect us to Heaven & the eternal life in God's Kingdom.

My dear brothers & sisters, what do you see on the Cross of Jesus? Does it bring you comfort & hope? Or, do you see only sadness & humiliation? I hope the Cross of Jesus will always remind us of God's unconditional love for us & the promise our own resurrection & the eternal life He has won for us. I also pray that it will encourage & challenge us to follow a life of virtues & be like Jesus in our daily life.