Lectio Divina – Exaltation of the Holy Cross - Years A, B, C

Contexts

John's Gospel – in brief

- **Structure of John's Gospel**
  1:1-18: Prologue – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.
  1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.
  Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!
  13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.
  21:1-25: Epilogue: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.
- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 3:13-17 – things to notice

- In this discourse, we are 'eavesdropping' as it were on a dispute between contemporary Jewish authorities and the Johannine community about the relative status of Jesus and Moses – hence the reference to going up to and coming down from heaven.
- No one, including Moses (considered the greatest), has gone up to heaven (ascended to the heavenly realm), but One has come down from heaven and will return to heaven – the Son of Man.
- Moses has a role but is subservient to Jesus.
- Note the play-on-words in 'lifted up' which can mean both physically lifted up and exalted.
- For John's disciples, this dual meaning of the Greek refers both to Jesus' physical lifting up on the Cross and to his exaltation and return to the Father in glory.
- While the crucifixion takes place in the earthly realm, when viewed with the eyes of faith it reveals the heavenly truth that God is love, a God who sacrifices his very self for the salvation of his people.
- In Jesus, God rescues humanity from death and makes possible a life of eternal communion with himself.
- God's approach to the world (and humanity) is not one of condemnation but one of loving salvation.

Reflection – not to condemn, but to save

It is rare for us to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on a Sunday. This feast commemorates the dedication, in 335, of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built on the site of the Crucifixion by the Emperor Constantine.

There is a very clear relationship between the first reading (Numbers 21:4-9) and the Gospel. The people in the first reading are healed by looking at a bronze serpent lifted up in their midst by Moses. Jesus says in the Gospel that he, too, must be lifted up so that all who believe may have life.

The second reading is the beautiful hymn from the letter to the Philippians (2:6-11). It is about God who willingly gives up his divinity in Christ to become one of us, accepting death on the cross to show the depth of God's love.

The cross is a symbol full of contradictions: an instrument of cruelty and torture, and yet the means of saving love; an instrument of shame and death, yet the way of restoring true dignity and life; an instrument of hatred and contempt, yet the strongest symbol of Love.

The symbol of the cross also carries the mixed realities of human life: moments of crucifixion and resurrection, moments of sorrow and joy, moments of suffering and healing, moments of hatred and reconciliation.

We use the Cross continually in our Christian tradition. We use it to mark the beginning and end of prayer and the Eucharist. It marks the beginning and end of our Christian journey in Baptism and the Funeral Rites. So, we use the Cross in moments of joy and gladness and sorrow and distress.
The Cross draws us into moments of deep awareness of the mystery of God's love for us. It reminds us that suffering and death are not the end of our story, that life and healing can come out of darkness and pain, that God in Christ remains faithful to us even to death and beyond.
Today we rejoice in a God who loves us that much and pray that we may be a continuing source of love, life and healing for one another.