

Exaltation of the Cross – September 14, 2025 – St Teresa of Avila

My friends, today's reading from the Book of Numbers presents a scene that is both sobering and strangely hopeful. We heard that the Israelites, weary from their journey, complain bitterly against God and Moses. Their ingratitude and impatience lead to a painful consequence: venomous serpents sent among them ... But even in punishment, God offers a path to healing—a bronze serpent lifted high, a symbol of salvation for those who choose to look upon it.

This passage is more than ancient history. It is a mirror held up to our own spiritual journey.

- How often do we, too, grow impatient with God's timing?
- How often do we grumble when we don't get our own way, in our own time?
- How often does our impatience and ingratitude compel us to speak and act in ways that quite frankly we should be ashamed of before God and one another?

As we try to better understand the reading, we note that the bronze serpent is not just a remedy—it is a prophecy. Jesus himself refers to it in the Gospel of John when he says:

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

The cross becomes the new pole, and Christ the new serpent—not in sin, but in solidarity with our suffering. Jesus takes on the venom of our sin – our evil thoughts, our nasty words, and our shameful deeds, so that we might be healed.

But ... healing requires looking. The Israelites had to gaze upon the very thing that reminded them of their sin and suffering. Likewise, we are invited to look upon the cross — not as a decoration, or as a mere symbol, but as a confrontation. To truly understand the cross is to understand our own brokenness and the depth of God's mercy. Jesus tells us,

*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves
and take up their cross daily and follow me.*

Carrying the cross is not a punishment - it is a participation. It is the daily choice to embrace sacrificial love, to endure hardship with hope, and to walk the path of redemption.

Carrying the cross is the daily challenge to re-tool our thoughts, to mind our words, and to ensure our actions, that all three show everyone who knows us that we are really trying, really trying to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

When I first came here, I had a kind of heated discussion with someone who was arguing with me about prayer ... She was emphatic on the thought that our prayer changes God ... no, our prayer is meant to be the vehicle to allow God to change us!

And further, understanding our cross means recognizing that suffering is not meaningless. Like the Israelites, we may be bitten by life's serpents—loss, betrayal, illness, doubt and the rest. But when we lift our eyes to Christ crucified, we find healing not by escaping suffering, but by transforming and growing from it.

The cross teaches us patience in the desert, humility in our complaints, and trust in God's mysterious ways. It teaches us that salvation often comes not by removing the serpents, but by giving us the courage to face them and to help others to face them too.

So today, as we worship on this Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, let us not avert our gaze. Together and individually, may we look upon the cross with reverence and recognition.

Let us pray for the strength and courage to carry our own crosses—not with resentment, but with resolve. For in every cross we bear, Christ walks with us. And in every wound we suffer, there is the promise of healing in this world ... and more importantly, in the next!

Blessings!

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