

Feast of the Triumph of the Cross: The Cross & Our Eucharistic Lord

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This weekend we celebrate the great Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

This feast falls on September 14, this Sunday; so it replaces the normal Sunday readings for the 23rd Sunday of the year.

This feast likely gets its name from our second reading today, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, where he tells us that

“Christ Jesus, though He was ... God [the Second Person of the Trinity], emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness” - in other words, the divinity of Jesus was not visible to men; it was hidden under the veil of His humanity.

Continuing, St. Paul says that Jesus *“humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. [And] because of this, God greatly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name that is above every [other] name”* – that is, Jesus, which means *“God saves.”*

Yes, it was through His suffering and death on the Cross that Jesus, the Eternal Son of God - who had taken flesh in Mary's womb - redeemed us, and saved us from our sins; saved us from eternal death, eternal separation from God.

That our Savior, Jesus Christ, would suffer and die on the Cross was foretold and revealed in a mysterious manner back at the time of Moses.

While they were wandering through the desert, God's Chosen People, the Israelites, whom He had led out of slavery in Egypt, complained against God and Moses, saying *“we are disgusted with his wretched food”* – i.e., manna, a bread-like substance.

In punishment God sent seraph (or fiery) serpents (like snakes) among them; when they were bitten they would die from the poisonous venom. This caused the people to repent; and they asked Moses to pray/intercede with God on their behalf to take the serpents away.

God ordered Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole - which we believe was in the shape of a cross – and whenever anyone who had been bitten by the serpent look at the bronze serpent mounted on the pole, they would be saved from death.

We know that the bronze serpent mounted on the pole was a *type* or foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who was affixed to the Cross by three nails. In fact Jesus Himself says this in His conversation with Nicodemus, as related in today's Gospel from St. John.

Jesus says: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

The Fathers of the Church and great Saints of antiquity tell us that just as the bronze serpent was without venom, so Jesus was without sin;

and just as all who looked on the bronze serpent mounted on the pole with faith would be saved from physical death, so those who look with faith upon Christ held high on the Cross, believing that He is the Son of God made man who died for our sins, will be saved from spiritual death.

In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus goes on to tell us God the Father's motive for sending His Son to die on the Cross for us: Love:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life . . . that the world might be saved through him."

Now, back to the manna. Like I said, it was a bread-like substance sent by God which the Israelites would find on the surface of the ground every morning while they wandered through the desert. It fed them for 40 years.

Like the bronze serpent, the manna was also a type, a figure/foreshadowing of Jesus Christ – that is, of Our Lord in the Eucharist. Jesus says this at the beginning of His bread of life discourse found in ch. 6 of John's Gospel:

“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died; I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will not die, he will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (cf. Jn 6:48-51).

Jesus goes on to say: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and by blood is true drink” (Jn 6:54-55).

In other words, having faith in the Eucharist - the Great Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood – is necessary for salvation.

And this of course includes faith in what happens at every Mass: The Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is re-presented under the form of bread and wine; and the priest, who acts in the Person of Christ, offers the Body and Blood of Jesus to the Father – in the same manner as Jesus Himself offered it at the Last Supper: under the form of bread and wine.

To better grasp the Eucharistic meaning of the Mass as a re-presentation of Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross on this feast day, try to imagine a cross with a consecrated Host in the middle (see the front page this week’s bulletin).

How sad it is that so many people do not believe Jesus’s words; do not believe in the great Eucharistic miracle that takes place at every Mass.

We need witnesses who will boldly proclaim this teaching of Jesus to others. The Church has a new saint who did precisely this – the first “millennial” saint: Carlo Acutis, canonized a Saint last Sunday, September 7, by Pope Leo XIV.

Carlo Acutis was born into a family that did not practice the faith. In an interview a few years back, his mother said that she had only received Communion twice in her life: her First Communion, and her wedding day.

As a boy Carlo was very adept at use of the Internet. He learned about Eucharistic miracles - where the consecrated Host visibly changed appearance into the flesh of Jesus; and how scientific tests were done on the Host turned

to flesh which verified that this flesh was truly human flesh; in fact, the tests proved that the flesh was the heart of man who had undergone great trauma.

In some Eucharistic miracles the wine had visibly changed into blood and when tested, the blood had all the properties of freshly-shed blood; and the blood type matched that found on the Shroud of Turin: type AB.

When young Carlos learned of these Eucharistic miracles, he wondered why everyone on earth did not know about them; about the truth of the real, substantial Presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

So young Carlos resolved to make the truth of this Great Mystery of our Faith known to everyone; and he did so through the Internet. (By the way, Carlo loved playing video games, but limited himself to one hour of games per day!)

Here are some inspiring words of wisdom from this young saint, newly canonized:

“The Eucharist is my highway to heaven.”

In the Eucharist, “Jesus is really present to the world, just as when his apostles and disciples saw him walk the streets of Jerusalem.”

“I think that many people do not fully understand the value of Mass, because if they recognized the enormous blessing we have in a Lord who gives Himself as our food and drink in the Sacred Host, they would go to Mass every day to participate in the fruits of the sacrifice and let go of so many superfluous things.”

“Virtue is acquired primarily through an intense sacramental life, and the Eucharist is undoubtedly the culmination of charity. Through this sacrament the Lord makes us be complete persons, created in his image.”

Reciting the Rosary is “the most important appointment of the day.”

Carlo Acutis died of an acute form of leukemia on October 12, 2006, at the age of 15, after much suffering. He accepted his suffering as a share in the Cross of Christ. He said: “I offer all the sufferings that I will have to undergo to

the Lord for the pope and the Church, so that I can avoid Purgatory and go straight to heaven.”

A true mark of humility – he did not presume he was going to immediately enter Heaven after death; but we know he is in Heaven now, having been canonized a saint.

St. Carlo Acutis, pray for us, that we may have a deep faith, like you had, in the great miracle of Christ’s Body & Blood truly Present in the Holy Eucharist!