

THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Year A

Numbers 21:4b-9
Psalm 78:1bc-2, 34-35, 36-37, 38
Philippians 2:6-11
John 3:13-17

Gathering¹

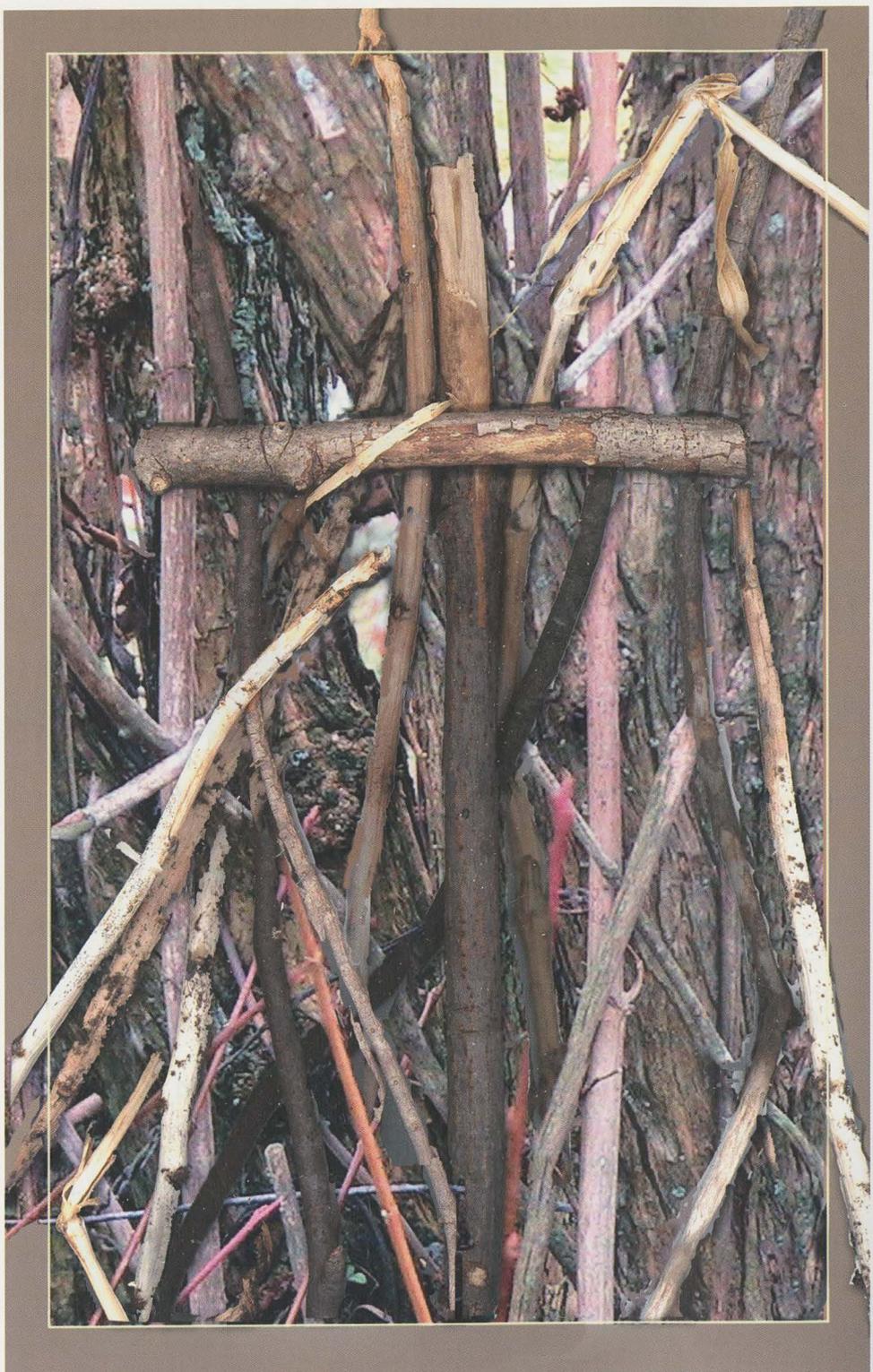
(An unlit candle, a bible open to this week's gospel and a simple cross made with two twigs lashed together rest on a table in the gathering place.)

This week we are called to see hope in the cross. We are called to see where this instrument of torture and humility is transformed to one of grace and love.

(When new members are joining the community, some time is taken for people to become acquainted, and for newcomers to learn something about the history of the community. All share their hopes and expectations about being a part of a small church community.)

Prayer

(The candle is lit and members sit for a time in quiet attention to the presence of God with them. After a time of silence, members pray as follows in two



alternating groups.)

- I: We glory in your cross, O Lord, and praise and glorify your holy resurrection; for by virtue of your cross joy has come to the whole world.
- II: May God be merciful to us and bless us, show us the light of his countenance, and come to us.
- I: Let your ways be known upon earth, your saving health among all nations.
- II: Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
- All: We glory in your cross, O Lord, and praise and glorify your holy resurrection; for by virtue of your cross joy has come to the whole world.

The Book of Common Prayer, Antiphon 1

(Members join in singing, “Glory in the Cross”. The song may be found on the Internet.)

HEARING THE LORD’S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed¹. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing.

¹ Unless members use bibles or missalettes, copies of the scriptures of the week are available from the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org/nab/

The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

This feast day marks the discovery of the presumed relics of the true cross by Helena, mother of Constantine. It also marks the halfway point between the Triduum and the end of the liturgical year. This is an important moment as it helps remind us that Jews and the early church saw the cross as, repugnant instrument of torture and execution. Christians have come to see the cross as a sign of our salvation. It is hard for us to imagine today, as it would have been for the people of Jesus time, to imagine death on a cross as a way to life but this is the message of this feast today.

This contrast is a good place to pray today. There is so much suffering in our world; families separated by war, the sick who suffer - both by the treatment and the disease, the abused and neglected, the hungry and the homeless. These are some of the *crosses* we bear in our world today. We look to the cross as a source of hope and anticipation. We are marked with the sign of the cross at our baptism and again when we bless ourselves with holy water when we enter a church, at the beginning of the liturgy, when we pray before a meal and when we ask God to be with us. This simple act recalls Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, but also our redemption through his death on that cross. It is the symbol we use to identify ourselves as Christians - our hope and our salvation.

In our first reading we hear of those who had been bitten by a serpent being saved by looking upon Moses' serpent. It is with this hope in our hearts that we look upon the cross. We believe in its power to save and to give us strength to weather life's difficult moments and the promise of eternal life.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ How do you feel lifted up by the cross in your own life?
- ◆ Which engages your spirit more, the cross without a corpus or a crucifix with the corpus?
- ◆ How have you been called to *die* for the sake of *new life*?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers

the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions¹

- ◆ We have been lifted up by the cross in our own lives – how do we lift others? Reach out this week to someone who is serving as a caregiver for a loved one who is sick by taking the person's place and giving him/her an afternoon off.
- ◆ Many in our world today carry a heavy cross. Find out how you might be able to help them make the cross lighter by learning more about and getting involved in the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development at <http://www.usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development/>.
- ◆ Set aside ten minutes each day this week for reflection and prayer. Where is your cross heavy? Where do you see suffering? Be attentive to God’s presence in the world and in your own life.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, the cross is passed from member to member, after

which the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: My Lord, your son has suffered so much, shed so much blood. I was born with so many faults and my nature is so full of weakness, and yet your son Jesus has died on the cross. For *me*. I know your grace has the power to cleanse me of my many sins and to make me more like your Son. Thank you for your goodness and love for me. I ask you, Father, to watch over me - always.

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Creighton Ministries

(Members join in singing, "Lift High the Cross." The song may be found on the Internet.

