

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

My dear Brothers and Sisters gathered here this morning,

It is an honor to be with you today to celebrate this great feast, as St. Helena was the discoverer of the True Cross, in Jerusalem. It was by the sign of this Cross that her son, the Emperor Constantine, was able to conquer his foes and end the official persecution of the Church. St. Helena began the traditions of the pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and was able to find many of the original sites in Jerusalem that were important places as mentioned in the gospels. So, we owe a great debt to her. It is noteworthy that in front of us we have the very large cross to remind us of who we are, of the sacrifice Christ has made for us, and as a sign to the world of God's love for the human family.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has reminded us that the mystery of the Cross is a mystery to be approached "in prayer and tears." (Sept. 14, 2014). A mystery, because the Cross is a holy symbol or sign of the intersection of the human race and Almighty God. The vertical line of the Cross is a sign of God reaching from the heavens toward us and our earthly reality. The horizontal beam of the Cross is a symbol of the arms of God reaching out to us to embrace us with all of the beauty, pain, sin, and hope within us. We approach in prayer because we are struck with a sense of awe at the majesty of God, who, in Christ, has humbled himself, taking the form of a slave, as St. Paul reminds us. What kind of God is this, who would so humiliate

himself as to enter into our humanity, our experience, our torn and wounded nature? Surely this is a mystery before which we must bow in prayer.

But the Holy Father also mentions tears. Why does he say this? Because it is before the cross of Jesus that we can lay down our burdens, seek repentance, and know that his suffering absorbs our own. Our tears may, at first, be the tears of suffering or pain. But, they are changed into tears of joy and happiness as we realize that the Cross is also the symbol of our healing, our strength, of the resurrection, and of the life of the world to come!

I want to linger on this point for a moment. Every time we profess the Creed we say we believe in the “life of the world to come.” What do we mean by this saying, “the life of the world to come?” In technical theology this refers to the eschaton, meaning the end of all things and the final coming of Christ. For us as Christians this is a source of joy! Or at least it should be! Because this is when Our Lord, the King of all creation, will renew and finally redeem all that He has made! This is when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and when peace shall pervade all things. This is when the deserts shall bloom, and the poor will receive their reward.

The Cross is the sign that leads us as we march through history to the day of final redemption! The Cross is the symbol of the Lamb of God, once slain, who is now Risen from the Dead! Lift high the Cross,

exalt Him who has lain down His life for us! As missionary disciples this is our call! This is our song! Let all the world adore His sacred name!

As members of the Mystical body of Christ we have a special responsibility to be living signs of the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. Our task is to help many, through the sign of the Cross, to come to know the great and merciful love of Almighty God. As St. John has told us, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” for us. Let us be faithful to our call, to fulfilling our mission. Amen.