

FEAST OF THE EXULTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS
14 September 2025

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Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflections on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 638

Reading 1 Numbers 21:4b-9

With their patience worn out by the journey,
the people complained against God and Moses,
"Why have you brought us up from Egypt
to die in this desert,
where there is no food or water?
We are disgusted with this wretched food!"

In punishment the LORD
sent among the people saraph serpents,
which bit the people so that many of them died.
Then the people came to Moses and said,
"We have sinned in complaining
against the LORD and you.
Pray the LORD to take the serpents from us."
So Moses prayed for the people,
and the LORD said to Moses,
"Make a saraph and mount it on a pole,
and if any who have been bitten look at it, they will
live."
Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent
and mounted it on a pole,
and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a
serpent
looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 78:1bc-2, 34-35, 36-37, 38

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!
Hearken, my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter mysteries from of old.

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!

While he slew them they sought him
and inquired after God again,
Remembering that God was their rock
and the Most High God, their redeemer.

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!

But they flattered him with their mouths
and lied to him with their tongues,
Though their hearts were not steadfast toward him,
nor were they faithful to his covenant.

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!

But he, being merciful, forgave their sin
and destroyed them not;
Often he turned back his anger
and let none of his wrath be roused.

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!

Reading 2 Philippians 2:6-11

Brothers and sisters:

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Alleluia

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel John 3:13-17

Jesus said to Nicodemus:
"No one has gone up to heaven
except the one who has come down from heaven,
the Son of Man.
And 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."

For 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.
For God did not send his Son into the world
to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Today is the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross. I
want to reflect with you about the mystery of the cross
in our lives as people of faith. For, I don't need to tell
you: Christ has given each and every one of us a cross
to carry.

What I want to say today is this: Our responsibility as
people of faith is to help others to carry their cross.
For, when we do this, something mysterious happens.
Christ lifts up the cross that we carry together.

This is what the Church means by "the Exaltation of the
Holy Cross," the feast that we are celebrating today.
When we help to carry someone else's cross, the cross
we carry is exalted.

Let me offer an example to illustrate what I am trying
to say.

Saturday, I celebrated the Sacrament of Matrimony right here at Saint Leo's with a wonderful young couple. I would like assure you of two facts: first, I can guarantee that they are married and, second, I can assure you that they are madly in love!

After the vows, there was the exchange of rings. Then the *padrinos* placed the *lasso* over the shoulders of the newly married couple.

The *lasso* is what it sounds like. It is a lasso – only it looks more like rosary than something you would use to throw a steer. The symbolism of the *lasso* should be clear as well: the couple are hitched!

Remember: the *lasso* a kind of rosary. This means that it has a crucifix hanging from it. At the wedding, after the *lasso* had been placed about the shoulders of the newlyweds, I put the crucifix in the hands of the young bride and then had her husband wrap his hands around hers.

Then I blessed the cross in their hands and said something like this:

The Lord, in his mercy, has given you a cross. He has given you one cross. Today, the Church instructs you to embrace this cross as husband and wife and carry it together.

As a married couple, of course I pray that you will have much happiness. But I am sure that, in your life together, many difficulties await you as well.

In this great sacrament, the Lord has given you a cross. Now embrace this cross and carry it together.

After I said this to the newlyweds, I turned to the couple's family and friends gathered all around them in the church, and said,

You have witnessed this couple exchange their vows with one another. The Lord has given them a cross to carry together.

Will you help this couple carry their cross?

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Lord gives us a cross to carry together. He give this cross to the husband and the wife, but he gives this cross to all of us as well. Matrimony is a sacrament for the whole Church community.

And this is true of all the sacraments -Baptism, Confession, the Sacrament of the Sick - all the sacraments. In every sacrament, the Lord gives a cross to his Church and then gives us the grace to carry it together.

This is the meaning of the feast we celebrate today, "the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross." Christ has given us all a cross to carry. He asks us to embrace this cross. But most of all, he asks us to share this cross with one another and carry it together.

And when we do this with one another and for one another, I promise you, the Lord exalts our cross and makes it holy.

PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as "a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys"). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don't rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually "reading" the Bible. Rather, we are "listening" to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the homily on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?