

Reading for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

14th September 2026

First reading

Numbers 21:4b-9

‘If anyone were bitten by a serpent, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.’

In those days: The people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.’ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 78(77):1-2. 34-35. 36-37. 38. R cf. 7b

Never forget the deeds of the Lord!

Give ear, my people, to my teaching; incline your ear to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable and utter hidden lessons of the past.

When he slew them, then they sought him, repented and earnestly sought God.

They would remember that God was their rock, God the Most High their redeemer.

Yet they deceived him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues.

For their hearts were not steadfast towards him; they were not faithful to his covenant.

Yet he who is full of compassion forgave them their sin and spared them.

So often he held back his anger, and did not stir up all his rage.

When a Feast of the Lord falls on a weekday, there is no reading after the Psalm and before the Gospel.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

Alleluia.

Gospel

John 3:13-17

‘The Son of Man must be lifted up.’

At that time: Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.’

Short reflection on the reading for today

In the time of Jesus no one would have considered crucifixion a triumph or a win of any sort. It may have been considered a triumph for those who were doing the crucifying; it certainly would never have been considered a triumph for the person crucified. Yet, that is what we are celebrating. Jesus, in being

crucified, triumphed. It was a triumph of love over hatred. As John the evangelist says in today's gospel, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.' Jesus revealed God's love in all that he said and did, but he revealed God's love most fully on the cross. John the evangelist would say that on the cross Jesus revealed God's glory. That is why in John's gospel Jesus speaks of his coming crucifixion as the hour when he is glorified.

Authentic love is always life-giving and that is uniquely so of God's love. As well as being the triumph of love over hatred, the cross of Jesus is the triumph of life over death. Jesus was put to death in the most cruel way but through his death he passed over into a new life and that life was offered to us all.

The blood and water flowing from the side of Jesus in John's gospel speaks to us of the life that flows through the death of Jesus. The cross has been celebrated in art as the tree of life. The triumph of the cross, which is the triumph of God and of Jesus over Satan and all the forces of evil and death, is a triumph in which we all share. From the cross Jesus draws all of us into the love and life of God. As he says in John's gospel, when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself. We simply have to let ourselves be drawn by him.