

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross      Sept. 14, 2008

Since today's feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross doesn't very often fall on a Sunday, we'll begin with a few words about the Feast. Which is, that in the year 326 AD, St. Helena, who was the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine--St. Helena visited Jerusalem, searching for the holy sites of Our Lord's life. On what was said to be the grave of Jesus, there was a pagan temple, which St. Helena had torn down (which did not make the owners too happy). Under the remains of that pagan temple, she discovered three crosses. Helena had a very sick person put their hand on those three crosses, and on touching one of them, the dying person was instantly cured.

St. Helena directed her son Constantine to be build a Basilica on the site, and nine years later, on today, September 14, 335, the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre was dedicated in Jerusalem. That church is long gone and has been replaced, but the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross has remained. [pause]

In Catholic churches, we don't have latte. In Catholic churches, you won't see a painting of the Laughing Christ over the altar. The goal of Catholic Mass is not to entertain us, or simply to make us feel good. In Catholic and Orthodox churches, our eyes are drawn to a Crucifix, and there we gaze at the body of God's only Son, hanging dead on a Cross.

But we have to understand that the Cross represents victory, not failure. Hanging from the nails, Jesus is most faithful, most

humble, most obedient, most human; he has emptied himself of everything except God. No retaliation, no escape, no despair. He accepts the Father's will in absolute trust. He is suffering, but he loves God perfectly.

For Jesus, the cross is triumph; it is like a trophy. He is faithful to God until the end--of the worst death that has ever been devised. Jesus wins. The devil loses. Jesus is actually glorified. [pause]

The first Christians did not have crucifixes in their homes. They didn't have to: they could walk through the city gates and see hideous, decaying bodies on real crosses outside the town walls. Those early believers knew exactly what Jesus had endured.

We have crucifixes because we don't want to forget. We have them high in the air so we can look at the cross and receive healing. We have crucifixes because we each carry our own crosses. Sometimes the suffering is from outside, but often enough our burden is simply to endure ourselves. We look to the Cross to learn how to carry our particular burden