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**“We Should Glory in the Cross:”
The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross
and its Contemporary Liturgical Significance**

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Liturgical Studies.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
Saint John's University
Collegeville, Minnesota

17 July 2006

This Paper was written under the direction of

Signature of Director

Martin F. Connell, Ph.D.

**“We Should Glory in the Cross:”
The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross
and its Contemporary Liturgical Significance**

Description:

This essay is an examination of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross as celebrated in Western Christianity at the beginning of the third millennium. While mentioning the historical events that occasioned its admission to the liturgical calendar, this essay focuses on the euchology and theology of the feast with a view to identifying its contemporary significance. With these foundations in mind, specific pastoral-liturgical suggestions are made to enrich the celebration of this feast in a parochial setting.

This paper may not be duplicated.

Signature of Student Writer

Date

Introduction

The fateful morning of September 11, 2001 — just a few days before the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross — dramatically played out the depth and paradox of human virtue and human violence. As historical events have done so often in the past, that morning's happenings wrote a public commentary on the paschal mystery. That autumn morning I was just out of the shower and not yet dressed when I glanced up at the television in my bedroom, only to see the second of two hijacked airplanes slam into the World Trade Center, showering glass and fire over lower Manhattan. The first airplane had hit moments before; news services were just going live with the unfolding story. No sooner had the second airplane hit, live on national television, than I found my right hand moving from forehead to breast, from left shoulder to right. It was a conditioned response, to be sure; an automatic, all purpose reaction. At the same time, it felt (and was) right. It was the only thing that I, as a baptized, believing Christian, could do.

Each September 14 liturgical Churches of the West and the East celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Bearing a long and complex history, this feast continues to be celebrated as part of the sanctoral cycle of the liturgical year. Fixed to its calendar date, it is marked by the full Sunday assembly only once every six years — when the date coincides with the Lord's Day. Because of its origins in antiquity, time and liturgical development have left their mark on the feast in a jumble of images and narratives that do not always seem to make sense when taken together. And yet, in spite of its roots and long path to the present, it remains a vital feast for the Church, a necessary recapitulation of the paschal *mysterium fidei*. The Exaltation of the Cross is a feast that celebrates hope and healing, gifts of grace revealed in cruciform symbols, and still offered to the world today.

This essay describes the historical events that stand behind this feast and examines the scriptural and liturgical texts that comprise its celebration in the modern Episcopalian and Roman liturgies. Attention is paid to the contemporary value of a feast of the cross. Finally pastoral suggestions will be made for a fruitful celebration of the feast in modern parish life. All of this is done with the awareness that the mystery that is celebrated on September 14 is also celebrated, with greater or lesser intentionality, whenever Christians gather in the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

An Intrepid Woman, Her Emperor Son, and a Bishop in Jerusalem

As stated above, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross is common to both the Christian East and West. In every Byzantine Church an icon depicting the history of this feast is placed along the top of the iconostasis, together with those of the other eleven “great feasts” of the Orthodox year. In the lower left quadrant of the icon, the emperor Constantine and his mother Helena are standing, pointing toward the center of the image. There, the bishop Macarius stands on a *bema*, holding aloft a wooden cross. He is attended by deacons with incense and torches, cantors, and members of the faithful.¹ In the background, a domed church — the Rotunda of the Anastasis — often appears. The icon thus visibly represents the four historical and legendary occurrences that are commemorated in this feast.

The first occurrence was the appearance of the sign of the cross to the emperor Constantine before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312.² The second event is the alleged

¹ A more complete description, together with a full color print of the icon, may be found in Michael Evdokimov, *Light From the East: Icons in Liturgy and Prayer*, tr. by Robert Smith, F.S.C. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 7-13.

² The details of this legendary occurrence are well known and need not be repeated here. The classic hagiographical account is in Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*, I:28-32. See Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, tr. by Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 80-82

discovery of the “true cross” of Christ by Constantine’s mother, Helena, in Jerusalem on September 14, ca. 320:

A temple to Aphrodite had been raised... upon Golgotha.... The venerable Helen had the statue of Aphrodite destroyed and the earth removed, revealing the Tomb of our Lord and three crosses. Of these it was believed that one must be that of our Lord...but Saint Helen was at a loss which one might be the Wood of our salvation.... [A] lady of Jerusalem, who was already at the point of death from a certain disease, was brought to touch the crosses, and as soon as she came near to the Cross of our Lord, she was made perfectly whole.³

The third event took place thirty-five years later, on September 13, 355, when the Basilica of the Martyrium and the Rotunda of the Anastasis — the back-to-back pilgrimage church and shrine erected to mark the sites of Golgotha and the Tomb — were solemnly dedicated.

Finally, on the following day (September 14) the relics purportedly discovered by Helen were exposed for public veneration. The ritual of that final occasion came to be repeated:

[F]or centuries, when the feast of the Elevation of the Cross was celebrated in cathedrals, the bishop would take his place in the center of the church and, surrounded by a great assembly of clergy, would majestically raise the cross [or its relic] high over the crowd and bless the worshippers on all four sides of the church while the choir thundered in response, “Lord have mercy!”⁴

It is this last event, first celebrated in Jerusalem by the bishop Macarius, which is depicted in the center of the icon, the elevation or *exaltatio* of the cross; and from this the feast derives its name.

³ *The Great Horologion or Book of Hours*, tr. by Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston: Holy Transfiguration, 1997), 250. The earliest authors mentioning the legend of the finding or “invention” of the true cross include Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Rufinus of Aquileia, Gelasius of Caesaria, Paulinus of Nola, Sozomen and Socrates. Eusebius’ *Vita* describes the excavation of the site of the Holy Sepulcher, but attributes this to Constantine (III:25-8); only subsequently does he mention Helena’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem, though not the invention (III:41-43). For a comprehensive study of the invention of the cross, including the various sources from antiquity, see Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991); also Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1991). For a less critical account that gives consideration to contemporary archaeological findings see Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew d’Ancona, *The Quest for the True Cross* (New York: Palegrave, 2002).

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, “The Elevation of the Cross,” in *The Church Year: The Celebration of Faith: Sermons, Volume 2*, tr. by John A. Jillons (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 41.

Though all of these events are commemorated on September 14, the casual observer in the average parish likely would not be aware of this history. The liturgical material for the Exaltation of the Cross is derived from events celebrated at other times throughout the Church's year.

A feast in search of a narrative

As the temporal and sanctoral cycles unfold year by year, most Christian churches and ecclesial communities focus liturgical attention on the mystery of the salvation during the celebration of Holy Week. On Good Friday, specifically,

the Church meditates on the Passion of her Lord and Spouse, adores the cross, commemorates her origin from the side of Christ asleep on the cross and intercedes for the salvation of the whole world.⁵

The event that Good Friday celebrates is the Passion of Christ. Liturgically, it utilizes the narrative found in John 18:1—19:42 to recount this event. As we have seen above, however, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross was not established to commemorate the passion of Christ; yet, it would make no sense if it were not grounded in this same event.

What, then, is to be made of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross? As a “feast of the Lord,” it draws fundamental meaning from an historical event in the life of Jesus that is recorded in the gospels, yet it does not rely on those evangelical narratives for its liturgical celebration. Its institution was occasioned by occurrences and circumstances in history that have their own narrative, yet that narrative is rarely recalled, accounted, or proclaimed in the liturgy itself. More than celebrating a theological concept, such as the “idea feasts” of the Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi and the Immaculate Conception of Mary, yet without

⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship, “Circular Letter *Paschale Solemnitatis*: On Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts,” (1998), par. 58; as in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, ed. by David A. Lysik (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 69.

commemorating a biblical event as do the “narrative feasts” — Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost — the Exaltation of the Cross is situated somewhere in between. Indeed, it seems to be a feast in search of a narrative.⁶

Contemporary lectionaries offer creative, if not entirely satisfactory, attempts at a solution to this situation. *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church takes two images found in Philippians 2:5-11 (epistle) and applies them to the feast. Christ’s own exaltation—his being “highly exalted” (verse 9)—is echoed in Jesus’ own statement, “When I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself,” from the gospel for the day, John 12:31-36a (here at verse 32, NRSV).⁷ Likewise, creation’s “bending the knee” at the name of Jesus in Philippians 2:10 is foreshadowed in the Old Testament lesson for the day, Isaiah 45:21-25:

By myself I have sworn,
from my own mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
“To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear” (verse 23, NRSV).

The Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass* in use since the Second Vatican Council likewise appoints Philippians 2:5-11 for the epistle reading. Unlike *The Book of Common Prayer*, however, it draws on an image found in the appointed Old Testament reading, Numbers 21:4b-9. In retribution for the grumbling of the Hebrews in the desert, YHWH sends saraph serpents among them. Those who are bitten by these poisonous serpents become mortally sick. Moses appeals to YHWH for the people, and is instructed to fashion a model of the serpent and mount it on a pole. “So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it on a

⁶ Perhaps the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross bears the most affinity with the feast of Corpus Christi, also instituted (in part) to commemorate an historical but not Scriptural event, the alleged Eucharistic miracle of Bolsena and Orvieto, in Italy.

⁷ The Episcopal Church adopted the lesson from Philippians and the gospel from the 1570 *Missale Romanum* of Pius V. Prior to the reforms borne out of the liturgical movement of the twentieth century, there were no provisions for this feast in previous Prayer Books, either in England or America.

pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live” (verse 9.) In the gospel for the day, John 3:13-17, Jesus relates his own Passion to the event in the desert: “just 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” (verses 14-15.)

In all of these texts, there seems to be a play on the Latin word *exaltatio*, from which this feast’s title is derived. In both lectionary traditions, Roman and Episcopal, however, it is Christ, and not the cross *per se*, who is “lifted up.” In the Episcopal lectionary, Christ is exalted in virtue of his being lifted up on the cross. In the Roman lectionary, Christ is lifted upon the cross like Moses’ serpent, to become a source of healing and the passage to everlasting life. Both groupings of lessons relate and reveal the cross in its historical use: the execution of Christ. Both also point to Christ’s glorification through the cross. Thus, the lessons indicate that the meaning of the feast is bound up with the whole Paschal Mystery of Christ’s dying and rising—the very mystery of which the cross is symbolic. From this perspective, it seems that there is *no separate or unique narrative* commemorated on this day. Rather, the lessons are summative of the theology underlying the Paschal Mystery.⁸

The Mind of the Church

A similar case developed in the euchology for this feast.⁹ The antiphons, collects, prefaces and other prayer texts for this day display, sometimes unevenly, the theological emphases also present in the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum. These texts represent the interplay of the Church’s liturgical practice—the *lex orandi*—with the Church’s theology—

⁸ This explains both the lack of precise narrative relating to this feast and the variety of lessons among differing lectionaries.

⁹ The historical development of the euchology for this feast—which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this essay—is comprehensively traced in Louis van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Holy Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy*, Liturgia Conenda 11, tr. by D. Mader (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 41-166.

the *lex credendi*. Stated differently, the mind of the Church regarding the mystery represented by the cross both informs and has been informed by the liturgical celebration of the feast.

The introit of the Roman Rite for the day is based on Galatians 6:14: “We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and made free.”¹⁰ This introit is also appointed for the Evening Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, the first liturgy of the Paschal Triduum. Of its use on that occasion, Gabe Huck writes,

It is a text that grasps the whole. The church is not afraid to speak of glory and of cross, knowing both and that the two are one. The church can sing at this first moment of “our resurrection.”¹¹

Just as on Holy Thursday, the introit encapsulates the total meaning of the Exaltation of the Cross. It sets the tone for the celebration, placing the cross within the larger picture of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and speaking of its benefits for the worshipping community: life, salvation, liberation and resurrection.

The collect for the day in the Roman Rite speaks of the obedience of Christ in accepting death on the cross. After stating that “we acknowledge the mystery of the cross,” the oration requests that the petitioners may “receive the gift of redemption in heaven.”¹² This prayer-text seems weak, failing to make explicit the “mystery of the cross” of which it speaks.

Somewhat more satisfactory is the collect used in the Prayer Book liturgy of the U.S. Episcopal Church:

¹⁰ Entrance Antiphon, “The Triumph of the Cross,” as in *Vatican II Sunday Missal: Millennium Edition*, prepared by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2001), 1070.

¹¹ Gabe Huck, *The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), 32.

¹² As in *Vatican II Sunday Missal*, 1070.

Almighty God, whose Son... was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have the grace to take up our cross and follow him....¹³

This collect connects well with the appointed scriptures, especially to the gospel lesson from John 12. It bears a different sense of eschatology than the Roman collect, which requests that the benefits of the cross be experienced in heaven, *i.e.*, in the future. It introduces, however, a scriptural theme that is not in the lessons of the day.¹⁴ While this highlights humanity's participation in the Paschal Mystery, it also adds more thematic imagery to an already rich, if not overburdened, celebration.

The Roman Rite provides a choice of two prefaces for the Exaltation of the Cross, one proper to the day, the other "of the Passion of the Lord."¹⁵ The preface for the day extols salvation through the wood of the cross: "The tree of man's defeat became his tree of victory; where life was lost, there life has been restored...."¹⁶ Though it does not relate directly to the scriptural pericopes for the day, it speaks with profound brevity of the interrelation between cross and resurrection, while paralleling the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3) with the wood of the cross.

The appointed preface from *The Book of Common Prayer* is that of Holy Week. Where the Prayer Book collect fails in connecting with the lessons for the day, the preface succeeds in recapitulating the message of the gospel:

¹³ *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 244.

¹⁴ Matthew 16:24, "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" Parallels in Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23.

¹⁵ Of the two prefaces "Of the Passion of the Lord," the first is allowed this day. It makes reference to the power of the cross which "reveals [God's] judgment on this world and the kingship of Christ crucified." See *Vatican II Sunday Missal*, 656.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 668.

For our sins [Christ] was lifted high upon the cross, that he might draw the whole world to himself; and, by his suffering and death, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who put their trust in him.¹⁷

Again, the message here is that of the lifting up of Christ upon the cross. The significance of this lifting up—of Christ and of cross—that is the reason for this feast’s continued inclusion in the liturgical calendar today.

The Sign of the Cross

The Christian life is lived in the shadow of, and under the sign of, the cross. In the reception of both infant and adult candidates for baptism, in the first gathering of the Sunday assembly, before and after meals, at the beginning and ending of each day and just before closing of a Christian’s casket, the sign of the cross is made over the body. The wonder of this flesh, so strong yet so frail, is marked forever with the symbol of destruction and redemption.

What the execution of Jesus of Nazareth has meant in salvation history, what it accomplished for humankind, and what it stands for in the continued unfolding of Christian narrative has been, and remains, hotly contested among theologians, preachers and believers. The death of Jesus on the cross has forever left its mark upon, and changed the shape of, human history. What Christians profess about God, Christ, the Church, and indeed the meaning of life itself, is configured around the cross. It is from reflection on the experience of cross and resurrection that the whole of Christian theology has its origins.¹⁸ Having served its purpose as an instrument of execution, the cross has become the premiere symbol of Christianity, with as many layers of meaning and significance as there are hearts to

¹⁷ *BCP*, 379.

¹⁸ This is the central premise of John Behr’s passionate introduction to theology, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006).

contemplate and minds to consider it.

At the cross, one who did no injustice met the death of the unjust. Christians proclaim that this death ended not in the extinction of Jesus, but the revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord, for lifted on the cross was the union of humanity and divinity.

When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness. In Jesus he does not die the natural death of a finite being, but the violent death of the criminal on the cross, the death of complete abandonment by God.... He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and godforsaken can experience communion with him.¹⁹

It was such a sense, the experience of godforsakenness, that I — and undoubtedly many others — had on September 11, 2001. The futility of evil was manifest in shattered glass and shattered lives, twisted metal and twisting plumes of dense black smoke. Like the apparent failure, suffering and death of Jesus, the *mysterium iniquitatis*, indeed, evil itself seemed to have won the day.

Still benumbed by this terrible event, the parish community within which I both worked and worshiped gathered three days later to celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The gathering rite on that occasion was punctuated with the ancient Roman prayer, "*Salvator mundi, salva nos,*" set as a mantra to the haunting strains of a chant from the community at Taizé, France. Save us, great Savior of the world, from this moment, its darkness and doubt, its horror and inhumanity. Save us, "who by your cross and resurrection have made us free."²⁰

Like the saraph serpent raised over the Hebrew peoples—in itself, a symbol of

¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, tr. by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 276.

²⁰ The full text of the ejaculatory prayer, whose origins are uncertain is "*Salvator mundi, salva nos, qui per crucem et resurrectionem tuam liberasti nos.*"

destruction—the flaming wreckage of the Twin Towers was held up before the world. Its effect, also like that of the serpent, was a paradox: for though countless lives — of those who died, and of those bereft — were destroyed in that doleful event, yet families were reconciled and communities bound more closely together in its wake. The Paschal Mystery, in however rudimentary a form, was repeatedly played out on television and in print media. The memory of that day’s devastation will forever be accompanied by the memory of hope and help expressed in heroic acts of selfless service. Years later, it still seems that the paradoxical mystery of human suffering and violence, a mystery remembered each September 11 and also celebrated each September 14, has not lost — and will not lose — its transforming power.

Coming roughly at the midpoint between Easter and Christmas, after many Sundays of meditation on the life, miracles and teaching of Jesus, the Exaltation of the Cross is a necessary reminder of the central mysteries of Christian faith. What is celebrated at each Eucharist, the proclamation of the “Lord’s death until he comes,” is highlighted and given new force at the turning of the seasons.²¹

With special reason [the Church] celebrates [this] feast now at the beginning of autumn; the Cross is “raised” against the rising darkness, a symbol of the might of hell, The Church wishes to “raise again the sign of the Son of Man” which will appear at His Second Coming (awaiting the parousia is thematic to the Church’s Harvest Time).²²

In this age of electric lights, when the shortening of days is defeated with the flick of a switch, and the onset of autumn easily ignored with the beginning of a new academic year, this recapitulation of the Paschal Mystery can renew in us a sense of hope. Celebrated with intentionality, it can become an annual marker by which Christians deepen their appropriation of the fruits of redemption.

²¹ See 1 Corinthians 11:26.

²² Pius Parsch, *The Church’s Year of Grace: Vol. 5, September, October, November*, tr. by William G. Heidt, O.S.B. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1963), 191.

Hope and Healing

The fruitful celebration of any occasion in Christian life is dependent largely on the pastoral and liturgical preparation behind the celebration. What follows here are recommendations for strengthening and enriching a parish community's liturgical celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross.

In the Paschal Mystery is contained the very power of the death and resurrection of Christ. This power carries with it the promise of redemptive transformation. In the face of the human experience of pain and godforsakenness, Christians recall with hope the reconciliation and healing extended by Christ the head to his body the Church. Though Christ is exalted in glory, he is "still pained and tormented in his members, made like him."²³

An annual celebration of the sacramental anointing of the sick and suffering seems, therefore, to be particularly appropriate on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. "By their witness the sick show that our mortal life must be redeemed through the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection."²⁴

The readings appointed for the day in the Roman lectionary are particularly suited to such a celebration. Careful preaching can encourage the whole faith community to recognize the Paschal Mystery's revelation in the suffering of those to be anointed. Likewise, the sick who come to the celebration can be encouraged to look toward Christ for healing and hope in imitation of the Hebrew people's gazing on the serpent. Thus the narratives put forth in the Roman lectionary may find new vigor in their connection to the sacramental anointing celebrated on this day.

²³ International Committee on English in the Liturgy, "General Introduction," *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1983), 19, par. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 3.

A connection between the annual celebration of the anointing of the sick and the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross can evolve into a standard part of a local community's sanctoral *ordo* as something looked forward to. Practical considerations, such as the coordination of transportation for the sick and elderly, opportunities for hospitality in the form of a reception after the celebration, as well as the need for a full complement of ministers at the liturgy, all offer opportunities for service and outreach within the assembly. Increased Church attendance may result on this day, initially due to the additional sacramental celebration. This situation may best be used as an opportunity for deepening mystagogical catechesis on the daily experience of the Paschal Mystery in the Christian life, especially for those in sickness and pain.

For those communities not celebrating the anointing of the sick on this day, yet wishing to give some prominence to this feast, perhaps a recovery of the ancient ritual associated with this day might be an option. This ritual would bear affinity with the rite performed on Good Friday, and some communities may find it pastorally advantageous to replicate the ritual as it appears in the Sacramentary for that day's liturgy. Other communities may desire that the veneration of the cross on the September feast be markedly different and ritually distinct from that utilized on Good Friday. The pastoral judgment as to how this rite should take place will vary from community to community. The following describes one approach to celebrating this veneration.

After the general intercessions, a large, unveiled cross is brought in procession through the assembly, with the singing of an appropriate hymn or acclamation, or adopting the stationary pauses from the second form for the "Showing of the Cross" in the Sacramentary. When the procession reaches the sanctuary or chancel, the presiding minister

could raise the cross for veneration *en masse*. During the elevation, some appropriate acclamation, such as the aforementioned “*Salvator mundi*,” could be sung. Also appropriate would be a repetitive Kyrie, not dissimilar to the Byzantine rite described above.²⁵ The cross would be placed near the altar, and the liturgy would continue as usual. Before the dismissal, the presiding minister could invite people to come forward to venerate the cross individually before departing.

Conclusion

Whenever the people of God assemble as Church, they do so as those who have risen in baptism, yet whose lives are forever marked by and lived under the sign of the cross. From the early fourth century, Christians have set aside September 14—in addition to the Paschal Triduum—to contemplate the mystery symbolized in this ancient instrument of execution. Confident in the healing extended to all through the Paschal Mystery of which it is expressive, they face nature's turn toward winter with renewed hope. Though the feast's historical roots and liturgical development have left it struggling for a narrative identity, the mystery of the cross—always taken with the mystery of the resurrection—remains at the core of Christian life. Through carefully planned, creative liturgical celebrations, new and meaningful connections with the natural cycle may be fostered. Despite its obscure origins, this feast may come to be embraced and appropriated by the people who live under the sign of the cross, who confidently place their hope in him who, when lifted up, draws all people to himself.²⁶

²⁵ See page 3, note 4.

²⁶ See John 12:32.

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