

SERMON FOR HOLY CROSS DAY

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SEPTEMBER 14, 2018

Holy Cross Day is celebrated on September 14th since that is the reputed date that St. Helena found the true cross in 326. It also is the supposed date of the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in 335 by her son Constantine.

Often it is called the Exaltation of the Cross, as in our office book, but the most common modern name is Holy Cross Day. Good Friday and the Veneration of the Cross remind us of Christ's suffering and the instrument of his death.

But today however is a day to recognize the cross as a symbol of salvation and life. Holy Cross Day was added to the prayer book in the 1979 edition. In the hymnal, the words of Hymn 473, "Lift High the Cross", have been cited as a good summation of the qualities that we celebrate today – the love of Christ proclaim, the cross as a triumphant sign, Christ draws the world to himself, we sing our song of triumph. In short, proclaiming Christ to the world.

In her book, "A Joyous Service", Valerie Bonham brings this home to our community when she states that "part of the ethos of the Community of St John Baptist has been to show forth the love of Christ to those most in need." That ethos has continued from our foundress, Mother Harriet, to the present day.

The name Holy Cross has played a significant role in our community. The early works of the Sisters in NYC included Holy Cross House, Holy Cross Church and Holy Cross Mission. And from those works came the inspiration and the call to found the Order of the Holy Cross.

At the main house of the Order of the Holy Cross in West Park, carved in the lintel over the front door are the words "Crux est Mundi Medicina" – the Cross is the Medicine of the World. Those words challenge me as I pass through the door. It is a beautiful lintel but what do the words mean? What is the message? What does it say to me?

The cross is a symbol of a torturous death but it is also a symbol of love. To live our lives as loving Christians, we need to take those words down from the lintel

and carve them into our hearts and lives. They need to be taken into the world as a message of love and faith. They are more than decorations on a building – they need to become a blueprint for our lives every day. As the blessing says, the world is now too small a place to do otherwise.

As Christians we are told to take up our crosses. In her book, “Love Heals” Becca Stevens asks us to consider the directive to take up one’s cross – not as a heavy wooden burden but as a symbol of compassion. She asks: “Do you feel your cross is a ball and chain? Does the cross you are carrying begin with a seed of compassion? Can you carry it and bear it with joy? Does it bring gratitude to your faith? Does the cost of bearing it diminish in comparison to the love it produces? Do you share the cross with others? Does the privilege of bearing your cross outweigh the fear of getting involved?”

Rev. Stevens goes on to say “that’s how it is in your daily commitment-your compassion leads you not to pick up some horrible burden but simply to fall in love. That’s what taking up your cross means: it means you are falling in love. It means you are becoming the disciple you were meant to be. It is not about gloom and doom for us....Our cross should stem from compassion for others and produce deep gratitude for the things that mean the most in our lives. It should remind us what we are willing to bear for the sake of love....It seems counterintuitive to think that our cross is our healing, but that is what the Gospels teach us.....The Gospels also teach us that while we do so much of our work alone, there is also a communal element to the saving, compassionate work of bearing crosses! Cross bearing is not just an individual task. Your daily commitment-the calling that moves you-is not just on you; it’s the task of a community. Christ was speaking to a community and He still is.”

By entering in the joy of carrying our crosses, we are able to take the medicine of the cross into the world.