

From the Pastor
September 10, 2023
Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Dear Parishioners of Our Beloved St. Paul:

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary His Most Holy Mother!

Tomorrow will mark 22 years that our beloved nation was ruthlessly attacked and so many of our fellow New Yorkers and even parishioners and their relatives died. People from 91 countries died that day in New York and Washington. We pray that God may give a place of refreshment, light and peace, to all who perished on September 11, 2001, and that Our Lady, the Joy of All Who Sorrow, will comfort those who mourn them.

On Thursday of this week, September 14th, we will celebrate the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross. *Cross, most faithful, you are the noblest tree of all. No other tree can compare with your leaves, your flower and your fruit.* Thus, did we all sing last Good Friday as we came forth to venerate the Holy Cross.

Through the Passion of Our Lord, the Cross became a throne of glory, not a gallows of infamy. On September 14th, in her liturgy, the Church sings: *How radiant is that precious Cross which brought our salvation. Through the Cross we are victorious. With the Cross we shall reign. By the Cross all evil is destroyed, alleluia!*

The feast we will celebrate has its origin in the first centuries of Christianity. According to ancient testimony this commemoration began the day the Cross was found by the Empress St. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. It developed quickly in the Eastern Church and soon spread throughout all of Christendom. In Rome a solemn procession from the basilica of St. Mary Major to that of St. John Lateran took place to venerate the Holy Cross before Mass.

At the beginning for the seventh century the Persians ransacked Jerusalem. They destroyed many churches and took possession of the sacred relics. A few years later the Emperor Heraclius recovered them. According to pious tradition, the splendidly dressed monarch, in full regalia, personally wanted to carry the Holy Cross to its original place on Calvary. The weight became increasingly unbearable as he walked the Via Dolorosa. The Bishop of Jerusalem, Zechariah, explained to him that in order to carry the Holy Cross he must imitate the poverty of Christ, who bore it free of every earthly attachment. Heraclius immediately divested himself of the imperial garments and put on humble pilgrims' clothes. He was then able to carry the Holy Cross barefoot to the summit of Calvary.

As children we all learned how to make the sign of the Cross as an external sign of the profession of our faith. The Church makes use of the Holy Cross on her altars during Holy Mass and the Cross

is displayed atop the church buildings. As *a tree of most savory fruit* it is a powerful weapon for warding off all kinds of evil, and especially for instilling fear in the spiritual foes of our salvation. *Lord through the Holy Cross, free us from our enemies,* we pray each day before signing ourselves with the sign of the Cross.

One of the great Fathers of the Church, St. John of Damascus, teaches us: *The Cross is a shield against the devil as well as a trophy of victory. It is the promise that we will not be overcome by the angel of death. The Cross is God's instrument to lift up those who have fallen and to support those still on their feet fighting. It is a crutch for the crippled and a guide for the wayward. It is our constant goal as we advance, the very wellspring of our body and soul. It drives away all evils, annihilates sin and draws down for us abundant goods. This is indeed the seed of the resurrection and the tree of eternal life.*

The Cross is present in our lives in different ways. It may be manifest through sickness, poverty, tiredness, pain, scorn, false accusations or loneliness. Though hard to bear at times, the encounter with the Cross can become a source of purification, and when it is embraced with love, it becomes our life and joy. Embracing the Cross should lead us never to complain when suffering adversity and setbacks.

We pray: *Most honorable Cross of the Lord! Through You, mankind has been relieved of the curse. You are a sign of joy indeed, and of terror to our spiritual enemies; you are the help of Christians, the glory of kings, the strength of the just, the splendor of priests, a staff of power to your people, and a source of peace. Around You the Angels gather in awe: You are the Glory of Christ who grants great mercy to the world!*

PARISH PICNIC: Our parish picnic will be on Sunday, September 24th beginning at 12 noon. All are most welcome. It will be a fun-filled afternoon for the whole family with treats for the little ones. Please be sure to attend and greet your fellow parishioners.

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda