

# Holy Cross Day, September 14<sup>th</sup> 2008

*“Grant O Lord that thy Word only may be spoken and thy Word only received. ✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”*

- I. Carved in stone above the doors of the first building ever built as a Monastery in this land are the Latin Words- Crux est Medicini Mundi. “The Cross is the medicine of the world”. When I visit parishioners’ homes my eye is always looking for the cross or crucifix which marks our homes as Christians. It reminds me that the Christian home is an outpost of Heaven itself. But do we modern day Christians even know why we value the cross and place so much emphasis on it? Is it just that it reminds us of Jesus? Or is it simply a nice, even wonderful work of art confirming our western culture and civilization? We wear crosses around our neck and make the sign of the cross on our bodies when we pray, but do we know why, and are we consciously aware of its importance?

Historically the cross is not the first symbol used by Christians. (My Confirmation Class will know which symbol was the first.) For 300 years Christians were afraid to be very open about their faith in Jesus Christ. To do so meant certain death and a torturous martyrdom. The cross in Jesus’ society was a symbol of ‘shameful death’, a negative symbol. A symbol of disgrace. Early Christians did not live their

faith so openly and freely as we do today. It was done in much secrecy and hiding.

II. The cross, of course, was known. St. Paul writes in his Epistles of the Holiness, the Sacred Role and the importance of the Cross to Christian life. At Holy Baptism, not only was water poured, but also each and every child and adult would be marked on the forehead with Holy Oil in the form of a cross. This showed that in baptism we are made 'Christ's Own', baptized into His death and resurrection. The oil is used because the word 'Christ' means 'anointed one' and the cross made to show by what means Jesus died for our sins.

But back then no one hung a cross around his or her neck or on the walls of their homes. It was in fact the Fish that was the first Christian symbol. In the caves and catacombs Christians secretly traveled, if you wanted to know if there were other Christians around, you'd draw an arc. If later coming back that same way someone had drawn the reverse arc (forming a fish), then you knew other Christians were present. It was a secret sign because Christians knew the Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥC, had the first letter of the words standing for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and Saviour'. An acronym.

III. When in 312 AD Constantine made Christianity legal, then the cross could come out of hiding. Even the original Cross that Jesus was crucified on was found and enshrined in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It was Constantine's mother, St. Helena, who

had the cross searched for and eventually found on Sept. 14, 320 AD.

When we sing ‘In the cross of Christ I glory, towering over the wrecks of time...’ we proclaim that the cross is part of God’s whole plan to reconcile us, to forgive our sins, and to make us citizens of His Eternal Kingdom. Is it any wonder then that I look for the Cross in the homes of Christians? I think God does too. But are we really taking in what it means? Especially when you make the sign of the cross on your body? What’s that about?

- IV. It is first and foremost making a connection to your baptism, when the first cross was made on your forehead, to link you to the greatest event of your life- Salvation in Jesus’ death on the cross. So when people enter the church building you see them take Holy Water and make the sign of the cross. Next, we make it when we hear ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’, which is the name of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, one God. For again at baptism the priest poured water on us in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly we make the sign of the cross when a Bishop or Priest makes the sign of the cross over the people to Absolve Sin or Bless us. I tell my First Communion Class that it is like the priest throwing or pitching you a baseball and you are going to open your glove to catch it. As he makes the sign with his hand you catch the blessing by making the sign of the cross on your

body. Then there are those three little crosses made at the Gospel.

They go with the prayer we should say as the Gospel is announced:

“May the Lord be on my mind, upon my lips and in my heart as I hear the Holy Gospel.”

Finally it is always good form for Christians to begin and end their prayers with the sign of the cross. It is like bookends holding up our prayer, setting the tone and demeanor of our prayer as simple and serious. So you will see many people doing it just before and after receiving their Holy Communion, or when they kneel down in their pews to pray before and after Mass. That is also why we are quiet and don't talk or chit-chat before Mass, because people are praying and preparing themselves to worship God.

So let us be mindful, knowledgeable and above all prayerful in the use of this sacred sign of our Faith. Remember it is the means of the Salvation by which God planned to forgive our sins and bring us into His Eternal Kingdom through Jesus Christ. Yes, it is the medicine of the world! *Crux est medicini mundi.*

✠ *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*