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Brothers and Sisters,

Today, September 14th, we celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. We remember the cross, the sign of shame and punishment, becoming the sign and symbol of sacrifice, healing, unconditional love, total giving, redemption, and salvation. No one expected to find the Messiah on the cross. But that is just the way God revealed the power of His generous, unconditional, and benevolent love. In the cross we see hope and we encounter love. The cross tells us that in the love of God nothing is lost.

Tomorrow, September 15, is the feast of "Our Lady of Sorrows." This title, given to Mary, our mother, focuses on her intense suffering and grief during the passion and death of her son Jesus. This suffering was not just about the passion and death of Jesus. It included all other moments of suffering in her life such as the flight into Egypt, the loss of the child Jesus in the Temple, the meeting of Jesus on His way to Calvary, standing at the foot of the cross, holding the body of Jesus when He was taken down from the cross, and the burial of Jesus.

Today and tomorrow, we celebrate the great compassion of our heavenly father revealed through the cross of Jesus and the sorrows of Mary. Sorrowing, mourning, and grieving are parts of the human condition. No one who cares for others can live long without experiencing grief and sorrow. Mourning however is not weeping and wailing and wallowing in self-pity, which are self-indulgent behaviors that can paralyze the mourner. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, God will comfort them". The "bliss" rises from the conviction that God will wipe away our tears, embrace us mourners with love, and help us to live in hope.

A challenge for us, believers, is to be signs that inspire hope. It is not enough to look on with sympathy and even weep for those who suffer loss. Believers must respond by allowing themselves to be broken and poured out in loving service to those who grieve. They must weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn and support them with love!

I encourage you to take few minutes each day of this week to remember those who suffer. If you know people who are suffering, send them message of comfort, hold them in your heart in prayer and be a sign of hope for them.

God bless you and your family and keep you safe in His Love.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Twenty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time

September 14-19, 2023

**The door of life is a door of mystery.
It becomes slightly shorter than the one who wishes to enter it.
And thus, only he who bows in humility can cross its threshold.**

September 14 – The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Serenity is the gentle acceptance of life's unpredictability.

Numbers 21:4-9

In the Biblical world, snakes, viewed as dangerous, vicious, deadly, and unpredictable, were understood as agents of Satan or Satan himself. This excerpt from the book of Numbers describes fiery serpents causing severe burning sensations and death itself. They interpreted their pain and suffering as God's punishment for complaining about their living conditions. Forgetting the abuse of slavery in Egypt, they began to remember how the food supply was good and began to curse God and his prophet Moses in the wilderness. In spite of the ungrateful complaints of the people, God heard the prayer of Moses and transformed the sources of evil into agents of healing.

Trust in the transforming power of God. God transforms even forces of evil into agents of healing and wholeness.

Psalms 78

**Hearken, my people, to my teaching;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter mysteries from of old.**

Philippians 2:6-11

In this early Christian hymn, the love of Christ, which Christians are called to share and emulate, is described as "self-emptying" love. Christ emptied himself in total giving by dying on the cross. Christians are called to empty themselves in compassion and love.

Give yourself to each other in love and service!

John 3:13-17

There is an ancient story about an old man saving a scorpion. While meditating under a tree on the bank of the Ganges, an old man saw a scorpion floating helplessly on the river. He stretched himself out and reached out to rescue the drowning scorpion. The scorpion stung him as soon as he touched it. The old man kept trying in spite of being stung over and over again. A passerby, who witnessed it, asked the old man why he was saving a creature that was stinging him. His reply was, "it is the scorpion's nature to sting, but it is my nature to save." Whatever the hurt, the old man was going to remain faithful to his nature to save. He was going to save a creature that was fighting back.

God has reached out again and again even when we continued to strike back. It is God's nature to save. It is God's nature, God's character, the very essence of God's being to redeem, to save, to love and to heal. We fail to respond; we often strike back like the scorpion in the above story and we remain ungrateful. God does not simply love...God is love. "God loved the world so much that he gave his only son...." (Jn.3:16). "The son of man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Today is the remembrance of the Cross. The cross, the sign of punishment and scandal became the sign of salvation. God uses even the signs of punishment and scandal as agents of healing, redemption, salvation, love and Grace.

Trust in the transforming power of God. God transforms even forces of evil into agents of healing and wholeness.

Saint of the Day, September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross and 8 other saints are remembered on this day

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated every year on September 14, recalls three events:

1. The finding of the True Cross by Saint Helena.
2. The dedication of churches built by Constantine on the site of the Holy Sepulchre and Mount Calvary.
3. The restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem in AD 629 by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, after it had fallen into the hands of the Persian Emperor Chosroes II in the AD 614 Sasanian conquest of Jerusalem.

Early in the fourth century, Saint Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, went to Jerusalem in search of the holy places of Christ's life. She razed the second-century Temple of Aphrodite, which tradition held was built over the Savior's tomb, and her son built the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher on that spot. During the excavation, workers found three crosses. Legend has it that the one on which Jesus died was identified when its touch healed a dying woman.

The cross immediately became an object of veneration. At a Good Friday celebration in Jerusalem toward the end of the fourth century, according to an eyewitness, the wood was taken out of its silver container and placed on a table together with the inscription Pilate ordered placed above Jesus' head: Then "all the people pass through one by one; all of them bow down, touching the cross and the inscription, first with their foreheads, then with their eyes; and, after kissing the cross, they move on."

To this day, the Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox alike, celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on the September anniversary of the basilica's dedication. The feast entered the Western calendar in the seventh century after Emperor Heraclius recovered the cross from the Persians, who had carried it off in 614, 15 years earlier. According to the story, the emperor intended to carry the cross back into Jerusalem himself but was unable to move forward until he took off his imperial garb and became a barefoot pilgrim.

September 15 - Mother of Compassion

Serenity is found in the acceptance of what is and the release of what was.

Hebrews 5:7-9

The author of this letter was writing to a people who were becoming tired of the sufferings and struggles of Christian living. He invited them to regard their struggles as opportunities for fidelity and obedience to God. He challenged them to look to Jesus as their model. In this excerpt, the author describes Jesus as praying "with loud cries and tears" to God. In faithfulness and obedience, Jesus accepted suffering and eventual death on the cross for the sake of sinful, guilty and ungrateful people. In this self-gift, unlike the priests before him, Jesus became the "source of salvation".

Jesus is the center and the "source" of our life and our salvation. Reflect on where your life is centered. Is your life Christ-centered?

John 19:25-27

This is a beautiful and inspiring story of how Jesus, even as he hung on the cross, was thinking of other's pain rather than his own. He stepped into the sorrow of others around him. The same chapter also tells us how those who loved him remained faithful and loyal to the one they loved as he suffered and eventually died on the cross. They stepped into and shared each other's sorrow. This is what the sorrowful mother did. She stepped into the pain, rejection, loneliness, anguish, and passion of her son and that of his disciples, without going under. She stood strong

and steadfast for her son and for his disciples. She became strength for the suffering, lonely, rejected and sorrowful. She emerged from her pain and sorrow to become for us a fearless, powerful, courageous and moving figure. Let us be inspired by the example of the sorrowful mother and learn to be present to each other in times of disappointment, pain, suffering and sorrow.

Saint of the Day, September 15 - Our Lady of Sorrows and 18 other saints are remembered this day.

Today the Church remembers Our Lady of Sorrows. Mary, the sorrowful mother, stood fearlessly at the cross while others fled. She stood strong seeing her son beaten, bruised, and placed under the burden of the cross. She was courageous and unafraid to stand by the cross as her son hung on the cross and welcomed her son's lifeless body into her arms. In all these, she saw the redemption of humanity and found peace. The image of the sorrowful mother reflects the wisdom of Jesus as he proclaimed it in the beginning of his ministry: "Blessed are those who mourn: God will comfort them" (Mt. 5:4); Be Compassionate as your father is compassionate (Lk.6:36). It is a good day to remember many mothers who have to carry heavy burdens....make an effort to ease up someone's burden today!

September 16 - Wednesday, Twenty Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Serenity is not a place, but a state of being.

1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13

Paul taught the Corinthians to let everything flow from love and to let everything flow into love.....everything a Christian says and does should emerge from love and converge on love! He insisted that love must govern their life, inspire mutual respect, kindness, compassion, tolerance, fellowship, and everything that would maintain a sense of belongingness in community, cohesion in the body of Christ.

Paul insisted that love was not a feeling...but the quality of being Christian...it was the very essence of being Christian.... it was the character of the disciple of Jesus. He described what love is not and called the Corinthian community to be aware of their limitations and encouraged them to develop their character as loving people. (Read the whole chapter to get good insight into this excerpt. These reflections take into consideration verses that are not included in the excerpt referenced above.)

Let love govern your life! Let love define your character!

Psalm 33

**Give thanks to the Lord on the harp,
With ten-stringed lyre chant his praises,
Sing to him a new song;
Pluck the strings skillfully, with shouts of gladness.**

Luke 7:31-35

Jesus rebuked his listeners for being deaf, hard-hearted, and unresponsive. God had reached out to them in so many ways and each time, they refused to respond. John the Baptist came and lived a life of austerity and the scribes and Pharisees said that he was a mad eccentric - a lunatic. Jesus came, living the life of men, entering into their activities, eating and drinking and celebrating life with them and the scribes and Pharisees said that he was a drunkard and glutton. Neither the simple and austere life of the wilderness nor the joyful, loving life with people in the open, made an impression on the closed, hardened mind of the scribes and the Pharisees. How about you?

Be attentive. Be docile. Be Open. Look beyond. Be sensitive to the world around you. Look around and rejoice in the presence of good and faithful people. Draw inspiration and strength from the witness of their life.

Saint of the Day, September 16 - St. Cornelius and 14 other saints are remembered this day

We do not have information about the birth and early life of St. Cornelius. He was Pope, the bishop of Rome from March 251 to his martyrdom in June 253. After the martyrdom of St. Fabian, there was no Pope for fourteen months because of the persecution. During this period, the Church was governed by a college of priests. Saint Cyprian, a friend of Cornelius, writes that Cornelius was elected pope "by the judgment of God and of Christ, by the testimony of most of the clergy, by the vote of the people, with the consent of aged priests and of good men."

He was pope during and following a period of persecution of the church and a schism occurred over how repentant church members who had practiced pagan sacrifices to protect themselves could be readmitted to the church. Cornelius agreed with Cyprian of Carthage that those who had lapsed could be restored to communion after varying forms of penance. That position was in contrast to the Novationists, who held that those who failed to maintain their confession of faith under persecution would not be received again into communion with the church. That resulted in a schism in the Church of Rome that spread as each side sought to gather support. Cornelius held a synod that confirmed his election and excommunicated Novatian, but the controversy regarding lapsed members continued for many years.

A document from Cornelius shows the extent of organization in the Church of Rome in the mid-third century: 46 priests, seven deacons, seven subdeacons. It is estimated that the number of Christians totaled about 50,000. The persecutions resumed in 251 under Emperor Trebonianus Gallus. Cornelius was sent into exile and may have died from the rigors of his banishment, but later accounts say that he was beheaded in June 253.

September 17 – Thursday, Twenty Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Serenity is the quiet confidence that comes from within.

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Paul tells the Corinthians that he is the least of the Apostles and that is only because of God's Grace. So, what he preaches, he says, is not himself or his own ideas. It is the Gospel of Jesus; it is the death and resurrection of Jesus that he proclaims. He says that he was giving the Corinthians what he had received as a generous and free gift from God.

Psalm 118

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
For his mercy endures forever.
Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever".

Luke 7:36-50

A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. A woman known to be a sinner in town came and anointed his feet with perfumed oil. Jesus used this occasion to teach certain important values. One thing which shuts a person from relationships with God or with another is "self-sufficiency." When you are self-sufficient, you do not need another and then there is no need to relate. The story of Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman demonstrates a contrast between two attitudes - one of self-sufficiency and the other of a sense of need; one of being filled and the other of real hunger and blessed is the one who is hungry - "the hungry shall be satisfied"

A sense of sin, of incompleteness and of personal inadequacies makes it possible for a person to open himself/herself to GRACE. Self-righteousness closes the mind and the heart where no light can enter.

Be open. Be sensitive. Be aware of incompleteness. Be at ease with incompleteness. Keep hungering for the food that nurtures you into the eternal.

Saint of the Day, September 17 - St. Robert Bellarmine and 19 other saints are remembered this day

Robert Bellarmine was born on October 4, 1542, at Montepulciano, Italy. As a boy he knew Virgil by heart and composed a number of poems in Italian and Latin. One of his hymns, on Mary Magdalene, is included in the Roman Breviary. He entered the Roman Jesuit novitiate in 1560, remaining in Rome for three years. He did his theological studies in Padua and Leuven where he was ordained a priest. He was the first Jesuit to teach at the university, where the subject of his course was the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas. His residency in Leuven lasted seven years. In poor health, in 1576 he made a journey to Italy. Here he remained, commissioned by Pope Gregory XIII to lecture on polemical theology in the new Roman College, now known as the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Robert Bellarmine was made rector of the Roman College in 1592, examiner of bishops in 1598, and cardinal in 1599. Immediately after his appointment as Cardinal, Pope Clement made him a Cardinal Inquisitor, in which capacity he served as one of the judges at the trial of Giordano Bruno, and concurred in the decision which condemned Bruno to be burned at the stake as a heretic. In 1602 he was made archbishop of Capua. As bishop he put into effect the reforming decrees of the Council of Trent. He in Rome died on September 17, 1621.

September 18 – Friday, Twenty Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

**Serenity is found when you let go of expectations
and find peace in the moment.**

I Corinthians 15:12-20

Paul taught the Corinthians that belief in the resurrection of Jesus was essential. If there is no resurrection, Christian life has no meaning. The resurrection of Jesus is the sign of the ultimate victory of good over evil, love over hatred and life over death. The whole Christian message is grounded in the belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

Psalm 17

**Hear, O Lord, a just suit;
attend to my outcry;
hearken to my prayer from lips without deceit.**

Luke 8:1-3

This excerpt remembers women who ministered to Jesus. They are remembered as women who received the gift of love that their master, Jesus offered and followed him and supported

him out of the generosity of their hearts. Their hearts were opened, and they opened their hearts in turn. This kind of opening is at the heart of the Christian story, the story of God's life and love, the story of our salvation. It began with the openness of a woman full of Grace, a woman of faith, of great love and compassion - a woman who opened her heart and said, "YES", "may your will happen". I

In this excerpt, we read about other women who opened their hearts and minds and ministered to Jesus out of their means. After the death of Jesus, we find these women of compassion standing beside the tomb, listening to the messenger of God inviting them to open their minds and encouraging them not to be afraid. They opened their hearts to the great news, welcomed the word of the resurrection like thirsty soil and hurried away to share the wonderful news with others because they were open, ready, receptive, docile.....

Your spirit must be opened for God's goodness and love to grow there. Open minds and hearts are ready to receive the abundant life and love and grace which God constantly offers.....

Saint of the Day, September 18 - St. Joseph of Cupertino and 11 other saints are remembered this day

Joseph Cupertino was born in the village of Cupertino, in the Kingdom of Naples on June 17, 1603. His father died before his birth. The family home was seized to settle the large debts that his father had left, and his mother was forced to give birth to him in a stable. Joseph began to experience ecstatic visions as a child, which were to continue throughout his life and made him the object of scorn. His life was not helped by his frequent outbursts of anger. He was soon apprenticed by his uncle to a shoemaker. Feeling drawn to religious life, in 1620 he applied to the Conventual Franciscan friars, but was rejected due to his lack of education. He then applied to the Capuchin friars in Martino, near Taranto and got accepted in 1620 as a lay brother. He was dismissed as his continued ecstasies made him unfit for the duties required of him.

After Joseph returned to the scorn of his family, he pleaded with the Conventual friars near Cupertino to be allowed to serve in their stables. After several years of working there, he had so impressed the friars with the devotion and simplicity of his life that he was admitted to their Order and was ordained a priest on March 28, 1628. After this point, the occasions of ecstasy in Joseph's life began to multiply. It was claimed that he began to levitate while participating at Mass or joining the community for the Divine Office, thereby gaining a widespread reputation of holiness among the people of the region and beyond. He was deemed disruptive by his religious superiors and Church authorities, however, and eventually was confined to a small cell, forbidden from joining in any public gathering of the community.

As the phenomenon of flying or levitation was widely believed to be connected with witchcraft, Joseph was denounced to the Inquisition. At their command, he was transferred from one Franciscan friary in the region to another for observation, where he lived under the supervision

of the Capuchin friars. He practiced severe asceticism throughout his life, usually eating solid food only twice a week, and adding bitter powders to his meals. He passed 35 years of his life following this regimen. Finally, on July 9, 1657, Joseph was allowed to return to a Conventual community in Osimo, where he died on September 18, 1663. He was canonized in 1767.

September 19 – Saturday, Twenty Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Serenity is the calm that comes from knowing you are enough.

I Corinthians 15:33-37, 42-49

In this excerpt, Paul tries to respond to the question about the nature of the resurrected body. He uses the analogy of the seed. When the seed dies the seed is dissolved and when it rises to new life and new beginnings, there is a difference in the new body and yet it is the same seed in spite of dissolution and difference. In the same way, the earthly body dies and is dissolved. When it rises, it has a different form, but it is the same person. Dissolved in death, transformed by resurrection, we still live.

Psalm 56

**Now I know that God is with me.
In God, in whose promise I glory,
In God I trust without fear;
What can flesh do against me?**

Luke 8:4-15

Jesus told his listeners the parable of the farmer going out to sow seeds. The seeds, which fell on various kinds of unproductive soil, failed to yield and the seeds, which fell on good soil, yielded abundance. The farmer keeps sowing knowing well that some of the seeds may fall on the wayside or among thorns or on rocky ground and may become unproductive. But he knows that some will fall on good soil and will yield. The farmer also knows that if he wants a good harvest, he has to prepare the soil, he has to choose good seeds, he has to sow and allow the seeds to sprout. He knows that if he wants a harvest, he has to sow even if some seeds may not meet his expectations.

The preacher must keep preaching, the teacher must keep teaching, the parent must keep loving, caring, educating and forming the character of children...knowing well that all that is taught may not be learned, all the love may not be fruitful, all children may not learn, all efforts may not be successful.....

Be faithful to your calling! All you do may not be successful in your eyes. Real success lies in your fidelity to who you are and what you have come to know as your calling. Just be faithful!

Saint of the Day, September 19 - St. Januarius and 12 other saints are remembered this day

Little is known about the life of St. Januarius. He was born in Italy and was bishop of Benevento during the Diocletian persecution, around the year 305. Bishop Januarius went to visit two deacons and two laymen in prison. He was then also imprisoned along with his deacon and lector. Legend has it that Januarius and his companions were thrown to the bears in the amphitheater of Pozzuoli, but the animals failed to attack them. They were then beheaded. What is believed to be Januarius' blood is kept in Naples, as a relic. It liquifies and bubbles when exposed in the cathedral. Scientists have not been able to explain this miracle to date.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**There is no love without forgiveness,
and there is no forgiveness without love.**

