



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### Feast of Triumph of Holy Cross, 2003

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My brothers and sisters, today we honor the cross as the means of our salvation. One of the early church Fathers called the cross a “winch” by which we are raised to heaven. The cross has been called “blessèd,” “faithful” (*crux fidelis*), “rugged,” “only noble tree,” “unique hope,” expressions showing the affection which Christian people have had for the cross since the beginning.

But the cross is a gibbet, an instrument of torture. For Christ it was a torture from which he recoiled, a shameful death, an infinite suffering not just physical but representing the rejection of his love by his creatures. How can we venerate this cross, how love it? Why do we exalt it? Place it on the walls of our homes and classrooms, wear it on chains, make the sign of it on our bodies?

The cross is the mark of God’s love for us—it is what our God bore and accepted in order to overcome it by being put to death by it. That is the core of our faith: we worship the crucified one because by his cross and resurrection he has set us free. He has borne the worst that human beings can inflict and nullified its power by rising beyond the grave. The instrument of torture has become the instrument of life. It holds no terrors for us any more: we can face it, shoulder it, as Jesus said we must do to be his disciples. We can glory in it, saying with Saint Paul, “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

The crosses of our own lives have been taken up into the cross of Christ—not removed, not explained away, but taken into the heart of the Lord himself where they are transmuted into instruments of life. Have you not experienced in your life a negative which has revealed itself to be a positive? Sin confessed becomes the means of grace—perhaps it is the only way of knowing the God who is mercy. We may have to struggle against a difficulty of temperament—a phlegmatic temperament, a choleric, a melancholy, a judgmental—may suffer ill health, wounds from the past, unemployment or an unsatisfying job, difficulties in relationships, loss of loved ones, failure of plans, the whole weight of the world’s misery. We are all on the cross, the things we cannot change, if patiently borne in union with Christ, can become sources of life. By accepting his cross, Jesus overcame the shame of it.

“By the wood of the cross joy has come into the world,” sang the monks at morning prayer. What must we do for the cross to become a joy for us? We must follow the example of the folk in the desert who through their lack of faith in the God who brought them out of Egypt suffered the attack of serpents. To be healed, they had simply to look on the figure of a serpent which Moses had



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raised up for them. Jesus makes this a symbol of what we must do: gaze in faith at the one who bore our sins on the cross, knowing that from him stream life and health and every blessing there could be. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world. Its arms embrace the universe, its foot is rooted in earth and its top extends to heaven. Through it you gather all creation to yourself and reconcile it to the Father, filling mankind with your Holy Spirit. May your cross transform us with its saving power and turn our sorrow into lasting joy.