

The Rev. Dr. Nathan John Haydon
Homily, Good Friday, 3 April 2026
Liturgy of the Day

The early Christians must have felt that they had no option but to talk about the cross. They knew that because of the death of Jesus on the cross their universe had changed. They no longer lived in the same world. They expressed this with enormous force, talking about a new creation, about liberation from slavery. They talked about the transformation of whole lives and they pinned it down to the events that we remember each Good Friday.

This quote from Rowan Williams gets across something that I think we oddly enough need to be reminded of: the centrality of the cross to our own lives, the event and the space where all things intersect and become transfigured. Sorrow becomes joy. Enslavement becomes liberation. Death becomes life, and because of that, the cross becomes an object of not admiration, but of veneration. The veneration of the cross, as we are about to do this day, has a long history; for example, on September 14th every year, there is the feast of the of the Holy Cross, originating and associated with the imperial Christianity of the fourth century. According to one legend, the mother Constantine the Great, St Helena, makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to scout locations for a new church and to locate the holy cross. As she is exploring, she begins to smell the aroma of basil. She follows it, and the aroma leads her to the spot where basil was flourishing. In that spot, the crosses were buried. Upon excavation, a dying woman is healed when she touches the cross of Christ's crucifixion, thereby revealing the power of the resurrection embedded in the wood which held the body of God.

Because of that, every single thing designed by wickedness, evil, and sin, every brokenness we experience, every fracture, every wound, every hurt, everything that separates us from the love of God and love between one another has the capacity to be restored to new life. For example, we see in one of the more horrific moments in the Passion of our Lord is when he is speared by the soldier to make sure that Jesus had in fact died. But from that wound, the very

essence of life pours out, blood and water, spilling on to the ground. In a sermon preached by John Chrysostom, a fourth-century archbishop of Constantinople, he says that,

There came from his side water and blood.’ Dearly beloved, do not pass the secret of this great mystery without reflection. For I have another secret mystical interpretation to give. I said that baptism and the mysteries were symbolized in that blood and water. It is from these two that the holy Church has been born ‘by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit,’ by baptism and the mysteries [that] came from his side.

The triumph and exaltation of the Cross is not beholden to imperial influence; its power rests in brokenness, from which victory emerges. The space and site of the Cross is from where the inexorable mercy of God flows, which we invoke every time we make the sign of the Cross over ourselves. As Moses lifted the bronze serpent in the wilderness to heal the wounded, the Cross is exalted because it was Christ who was lifted up on it, raising us up with him, to restore, heal, comfort, and enfold us in a love that is engrained in the depths of God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.” In passing through the heavens, through death and into resurrection, Jesus bore us with him as well; we have passed through those things with him, which is why we are able to approach the throne of grace without fear.

So I encourage you to venerate the cross now, and every day. Make the cross, and everything it symbolizes and means for us, a central part of your life. Make the sign of the cross over yourself, and bless yourself with the symbol of life. Don’t be shy about this – don’t approach it with any hesitation. We are new people because of this moment, and because of the wood upon which hung the salvation of the world. What was an instrument of death and torture was transformed through the depth of unrestrained love into a throne of light and life from which the Lord reigns. Thanks be to God.

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