

Homily based on the readings from September 14, 2025 (Numbers 21.4b-9; Philippians 2.6-11; John 3.13-17)

Over the past two thousand years, no symbol has been more universally recognizable in the Western world than the Cross – as part of our architecture, our artwork, and even our personal attire. Despite the forces of secularism *aggressively* seeking to bury it, the Cross remains a tangible reminder that our laws, our liberties, and our learning are *fundamentally* rooted in the eternal truth of the Gospel. The Cross represents everything that is honorable and just about our society – and a rejection of all that is cruel and hateful.

There *is* one negative effect, though, of the prominence of the Cross: we can easily forget how unbelievably *shocking* its message truly is. The Cross is not just a decoration, or an emblem, or even an object of devotion – but an inescapable reminder of the pain and suffering that pervades the world around us. When a deranged gunman shoots through a stained glass window at a group of schoolchildren gathering for Mass,

that is an example of the Cross. When a Christian speaker is *assassinated* for *courageously* engaging with college students on issues relating to God, family, and country, that is an example of the Cross.

When our nation willfully murders a *million* unborn babies every year under the guise of healthcare, that is an example of the Cross. At its core, the Cross signifies the *brokenness* of human life and the *evil* that is endured by all God's faithful servants.

From a human perspective, it makes no sense that we are so profoundly drawn to the Cross. The *natural* reaction would be to run away in terror.

By worldly standards, the Cross is a symbol of failure and despair – in the words of Saint Paul, “a stumbling block ... and foolishness.”

Nevertheless, we all know that “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” Even though the Cross reminds us of the *imminence* of death, it also proclaims the *inevitable* victory of life. In the words of Saint Leo the Great, the power of the Cross “did away with the everlasting character of death so as to make death a thing of time, not of eternity.”

In many respects, Christianity is a faith of paradoxes. *The first shall be last and the last shall be first.* Christ is fully God and fully man. God is three and God is one. At the heart of these contradictions is the essential principle of the Cross: death is the necessary pathway to life. Only through embracing the Crucifixion of our Lord and Savior – and willingly accepting the suffering that is set before us – can we hope to attain the eternal happiness the Lord has prepared for all his beloved children.

From a practical perspective, it is almost impossible to understand how this concept plays out in our daily lives. None of us can explain how the specific trials of *this* world equip us to receive the joys of the *next* – nor should we even *attempt* to do so. “No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man.” Whatever heaven looks like, it is completely different from anything *any* of us has ever experienced. Even the basic notions of time – past, present, and future – no longer have any meaning. As Saint Augustine observed:

There, the days do not come and go in succession, and the beginning of one day does not mean the end of another; all days are one, simultaneously and without end[.]

In the current phase of our existence, none of us can perceive more than the faintest shadows of our heavenly homeland.

Once we encounter our Risen Lord, however, everything will become completely clear. As Saint Paul put it:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

Every mystery will be revealed, every paradox resolved. We will not only comprehend the wonders of the Holy Trinity and the hypostatic union, but the ways in which our own sorrows and tribulations – and those of our loved ones – have prepared us for the everlasting bliss of heaven.

Here and now, as we face the confusions and uncertainties of this mortal life, *all* we can rely on is our faith – “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” That faith draws us *inexorably* towards the Cross of Christ. We know, in the depths of our hearts, that if we believe in the Son of Man – and unite ourselves fully to his sufferings – then we will surely have eternal life. The Cross is not only the instrument of our salvation, but the promise of our rebirth. If we join in humbling ourselves with our Crucified Lord, then we too will share in his ultimate exaltation.