

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Today's feast commemorates the finding of the true cross by St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, in 320 A.D. It also commemorates the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, which had been rebuilt by the Crusaders, in 1149 A.D.

In his book *Why Am I Afraid to Love*, Fr. John Powell wrote that Harvard poet Archibald MacLeish said that symbols and images speak to us more powerfully than words or ideas. According to MacLeish, the symbol of loneliness is two lights above the sea. A solitary figure standing in a doorway is the symbol of grief.¹ For most of us, a heart is the symbol of love. However, for Christians, the greatest symbol of love is the cross. This is why there is almost always a crucifix in the front of our Catholic Churches. This is why there should be at least one crucifix in every Catholic home.

John 3:16 is probably best known verse in Scripture: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."* God not only loves us, but, as Fr. Rene Latourelle often said and wrote, he loves us superabundantly.

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us" [Jn. 1:14]. God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to live among us as one of us. Jesus loves us so much that he allowed himself to be crucified for us: *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* [Jn. 15:13]. Having died and risen, he sent his Holy Spirit of love to live within us forever. As St. John wrote in the Prologue of his Gospel, *"Of his fulness we have all had a share—love following upon love"* [Jn. 1:16; NAB 1970].

St. Paul captured Jesus' superabundant love for us in today's reading from Philippians: *"Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."* Jesus said the same thing more simply: *"For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"* [Mk. 10:45].

This obviously has profound implications for us. We all know the motto of St. Therese: "Love is repaid by love alone." Jesus said, *"Love one another as I have loved you"* [Jn. 15:12; JB]. Jesus' death on the cross embodies the deepest meaning of love. All authentic human love is sacrificial: self-revealing, self-giving, self-sacrificing. As St. John wrote in his First Letter, *"Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth"* [3:8].

My brothers and sisters, symbols speak to us more powerfully than words or ideas. The cross is the symbol of the greatest love story ever told or lived.

¹John Powell, S.J., *Why Am I Afraid to Love?* (Chicago, IL: Argus Communications Co., 1967), p. 72.