

Sunday Message

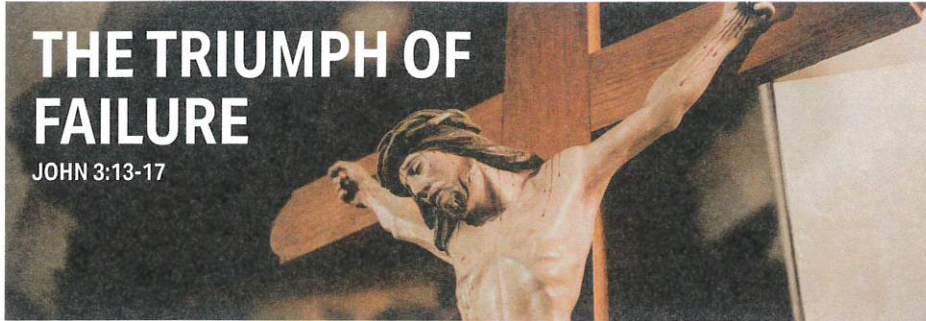
THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

THE WORD

Year C • 14 September 2025 • Psalter Week 4

THE TRIUMPH OF FAILURE

JOHN 3:13-17



We live in a world that rewards success. And it seems easy enough to measure it.

If you win gold in the Olympics, that's success. If you graduate from a top college with a first-class degree, that's success. If you manage your team to league or cup glory, that's success. If you climb the corporate ladder and reach the top of your profession, that's success. If you have a bank account that keeps on growing, that's success.

Worldly success is measurable, quantifiable, and others can see it. Failure is measurable, too. We know failure when we see it. The difference between being successful and being a failure is obvious.

That's why on the face of it today's feast seems like some sort of contradiction. We are celebrating the exaltation of the cross. We are celebrating the triumph of something that was used as an instrument of execution. We are celebrating failure.

To be put to death on a cross was to come to the most ignoble end possible. It's what happened to thieves and murderers. It's how rabble-rousers and revolutionaries were dealt with. It was the fate of losers.

Death on a cross was something to be ashamed of, not glory in. It's why down the centuries so many people have had difficulty with a religion that exalts a cross.

But for Christians there is no contradiction here; the cross of Christ is something glorious, something to boast about, because it points to just how much God loves us.

In order to show us how to live, Jesus was prepared to risk everything, even life itself. He didn't have to do it – but he did. And God vindicated him by raising him from the dead. Tragedy turned to triumph, darkness to light, death to new life.

The cross of Christ has given us life and hope. By any reckoning, even if it cannot be measured on Wall Street, that sounds like a definition of success. ■

SAY

Repeat today's entrance antiphon:
"We should glory in the Cross
of our Lord Jesus Christ, in
whom is our salvation, life and
resurrection, through whom we
are saved and delivered."

PRAY

In the second reading, St Paul quotes a hymn about Jesus, sung by the early Christian communities. It tells the story of God's Son, who came into the world and became like us, sharing our human nature. He went so far as to be executed as a criminal on a cross, and for his obedience God raised him up and made him higher than all creation. It's a beautiful hymn that sums up what we believe. Read it prayerfully today. Make it a profession of faith.

DO

Many people wear a crucifix today as a fashion statement rather than a statement of faith. Do you have a cross or crucifix, and how do you use it?

LEARN

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross marks two historical events: the discovery of the True Cross by Saint Helena on this date in 320 under the temple of Venus in Jerusalem, and the dedication in 335 of the basilica and shrine built on Calvary by Constantine, marking the site of the crucifixion. This feast has been celebrated ever since, in praise of the redemption won for us by the cross of Christ.

REFLECT

Every night when I was young, we prayed the Apostles' Creed as part of the family rosary. When I began to pay attention to the words, one line in particular struck me as odd; the line where it said of Jesus that he descended into hell. That didn't make sense to me. I understood hell as a place bad people were sent to for all eternity, a place that was impossible to escape from. You were condemned to hell because you deserved it, and you would be stuck there in agony forever. Innocent people didn't end up in that terrible place, so how then could the creed – our profession of faith – state that God's own son ended up there? Surely, some mistake.

Later, I learned that theologians understood this descent into hell as the period between Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection – the waiting period, the interregnum, between the darkness of Good Friday and the glory of Easter Sunday.

But it also has another more profound meaning. It describes Jesus' experience of total abandonment, loss, misery, suffering. It describes the utter devastation Jesus felt at the time of his passion and death. When we say, 'I'm going through hell,' that's what Jesus experienced. He went through hell – the anguish of torture and crucifixion, of being abandoned by his friends, even seemingly by God. Anyone who has suffered pain and heartbreak knows exactly what this is like. It reminds us that God's son entered

fully into the human condition. Jesus has personal experience of abandonment, betrayal, humiliation, suffering and death. He went through hell for our sake, and so we can turn to him with confidence in our need. He knows what it's like to be miserable.

The next verse of the Apostles' Creed states that, 'on the third day he rose again from the dead'. God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus passed through death to a new, glorified life and this is the promise of our faith. Whatever hell we go through, whatever setbacks or sufferings we endure as humans and Christians, we know that suffering and death do not have the last word. The cross of Christ has triumphantly opened for us the gates to eternal life. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection,
through whom we are saved and delivered.*

COLLECT

O God, who willed that your Only Begotten Son
should undergo the Cross to save the human race,
grant, we pray,
that we, who have known his mystery on earth,
may merit the grace of his redemption in heaven.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

FIRST READING Numbers 21:4b-9

A reading from the Book of Numbers.

In those days: The people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.' Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 78(77):1-2. 34-35. 36-37. 38. R. cf. 7b

R: Never forget the deeds of the Lord!

1. Give ear, my people, to my teaching;
incline your ear to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable
and utter hidden lessons of the past. **R.**
2. When he slew them, then they sought him,
repented and earnestly sought God.
They would remember that God was their rock,
God the Most High their redeemer. **R.**
3. Yet they deceived him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues.
For their hearts were not steadfast towards him;
they were not faithful to his covenant. **R.**
4. Yet he who is full of compassion
forgave them their sin and spared them.
So often he held back his anger,
and did not stir up all his rage. **R.**

SECOND READING Philippians 2:6-11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL John 3:13-17

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

At that time: Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May this oblation, O Lord,
which on the altar of the Cross
cancelled the offence of the whole world,
cleanse us, we pray, of all our sins.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*When I am lifted up from the earth,
I will draw everyone to myself, says the Lord.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Having been nourished by your holy banquet,
we beseech you, Lord Jesus Christ,
to bring those you have redeemed
by the wood of your life-giving Cross
to the glory of the resurrection.
Who live and reign for ever and ever.

Amen.