

This Month's Liturgy: September 2021

On 14th of this month, the liturgy keeps a feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – a remembrance of the discovery (to exalt, to raise up) in around the year 320 by Saint Helena, mother of the emperor Constantine, of the true cross upon which the Lord Jesus died.

In the year 335 the emperor Constantine had a shrine church build over the site of Calvary and until its destruction by the Persians in the 7th century it was known by the name Martyrium – the place of witness or the giving of life. We are reminded each time we enter church or begin our prayers that the cross with which we sign ourselves is for us a sign of life and of the self-giving of Jesus and the action is in itself a prayer – a desire that our bodies and our living will be signed with his example of his self-giving love which is the inspiration and the source of strength for our service to others.

The traditional devotion of the Stations of the Cross which many of us will pray daily or weekly and which is before our eyes when we enter into our churches, appears to have been brought back to Europe in medieval times by those who had visited Jerusalem. They wanted both to share with others their experiences of walking and standing (the *statio*) where Jesus himself had walked on the sad journey, the *via dolorosa*, which lead him to Calvary but also to make reflection on the way of the cross a daily and living part of their own spiritual lives – as Jesus loves, so we are called to love, and part of that loving will be the suffering and the carrying of the cross in imitation of the Lord.

So the devotion to the sufferings of Christ is not just something for Lent and Holy Week: as we look at our communities, our society and indeed our world today, we see many many examples of the suffering of Christ today – and our prayer is that just as the cross was the gateway to the new life of the Resurrection, so for ourselves and our world, there may be the fullness of life after such pain and suffering.

We adore you O Christ and we praise you

Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.