

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
September 14, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.” (Luke 23:33)

*“But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”
(Genesis 3:9-10)*

Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, authored one sentence which will guide our reflection upon this weekend’s celebration of The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (of Christ). He wrote this: “The degradation of Jesus’ nakedness is a significant part of the scandal of the cross, and yet it is through his nakedness that he conquers.” Let us return to Eden (Paradise) where our celebration finds its beginning.

In the Beginning when God created man, he clothed him with divine light. This light opened man’s eyes to seek God, himself and all creation as wonderfully made. Adam (man) was endowed with certain intellectual and physical gifts which were freely bestowed upon him by God. Adam had total control of himself, granting him a profound inner peace which manifested itself externally in his dealings with the plants and animals. Once Adam and Eve had raised their hand and taken from the Tree, Genesis tells us their eyes were opened. They saw themselves as who they are, weak and frail. They chose to cover themselves with leaves to clothe their shame of failure. The original innocence of man, signified by the term “nakedness,” is now covered, hidden from each other, but always visible to God who created them.

Prior to Jesus being nailed to the cross, we are told of the soldiers casting lots for his garments. For this to take place, Jesus must be stripped of these same garments. We can now say: Jesus, divested of the garments which once covered man’s shame, is now affixed to the wood of a tree. In this act, the fruit of the womb of Mary replaces the old fruit of the Garden ripped away from the Tree. And, this new “Fruit of Restored Innocence” supplants the older understanding of Good and Evil by becoming the New Law and Lawgiver. Man, still weakened by the sin of Adam, is now restored, not to a state equal with Adam, but far surpassing that which Adam was originally gifted with.

One may wonder as to how this understanding may be useful today. As I heard someone speak of a priest years ago: “Father must be very smart, because I did not understand what he said in the homily.” We must be willing to be stripped with Jesus. We must be willing to be stripped of all of our preconceived notions of God, ourselves and each other. We must invite the Holy Spirit to guide our lives, specifically through this process of relieving us of those things we use to cover ourselves. From the created things we procure, to the images we hold, to the masks we wear, all these must be stripped away from us before we can become like Him who created us. And, to undergo this process means we must become one with Jesus in His being nailed to the cross. We must be nailed to the cross. We must undergo suffering. We rejoice in His Cross, as we joyfully accept and embrace our own crosses. The road to Easter Sunday must always proceed through Good Friday. There is no other way to Paradise.