

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: (Jn. 3:13-17)

Today's wonderful feast is a reminder of the amazing work of the triune God. The cross, an instrument of torture has become the symbol of our redemption from sin; God works in amazing and unexpected ways!

This is a detail of a 12th century mosaic, the "Triumph of the Cross" in the basilica of San Clemente in Rome. The mosaic is intensely trinitarian. Christ is seen standing, not slumped, on the cross, reflecting the vision in the book of Revelation of "a Lamb standing that seems to have been slain" (Rev.



5:6). Blood pours from His side indicating the Eucharist and this is echoed in the fine red line around the black cross. The position of this mosaic behind the main altar on the basilica reminds the congregation that at Mass they are participating in Christ's one eternal sacrifice.

Above, we see the hand of the Father, supporting His Son. The Father's face is hidden, as Jesus said whoever sees Him sees the Father (Jn. 14:9). The Father is crowning His Son with the crown of victory, a laurel wreath, instead of the usual crown of thorns. Christ's victory over sin and death is the greatest victory and greatest gift that we have been given.

The Holy Spirit, indicated by the doves on the cross with Jesus, show the total love and support given to the Son by the Holy Spirit. As God the Son, Jesus was never without the Spirit; He was conceived by the Spirit in the womb of Mary (Lk. 1:35); He was anointed by Him at His Baptism (Lk. 3:22) and guided by Him all through His ministry. At His death He

“gave the Spirit” back to His Father (Lk. 23:46). We are reminded that we too are supported and guided by the Holy Spirit in our Christian lives, for in our Baptism we died with Christ (Rom 6:4) and have received the indelible seal of the Holy Spirit (Catechism 1274). Note the fires in braziers either side of the cross which also indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit. At Mass, the priest asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit so that the bread and wine may become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; the same Jesus we see here on the cross.

The cross unites heaven and earth; the top reaches the “clouds” of heaven and the foot is covered with vegetation which curls around the whole mosaic, showing the fruitfulness of Christ’s work of our redemption. When God became man in Jesus Christ, heaven and earth were united in the one person, but now, because of Christ’s death and Resurrection, we are all able to share in that unity through our Baptism.

There is a lot more that can be said. The golden background indicates heaven and at Mass, we are united with heaven as we praise God in the “Holy Holy Holy” with the heavenly hosts (angels and saints). The presence of Mary and St. John on either side of the cross reminds us of this; they who were with Him at His death are with Him still and are praying for us.

Carol Ann Harnett 14th September 2020