

Our parish of Holy Cross – St. John the Baptist celebrates one of our two parish feasts on September 14th – the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross*.



The paschal mystery of Jesus crucified and risen sits at the heart of our Christian faith. The claim that in Jesus' cross and resurrection death has been defeated and life indestructible is now on offer through the Risen One is a core feature of the gospel we proclaim for the salvation of the world. To better understand the mystery of the cross and its relationship to both the divine will and human will, we do well to reflect upon the shape of human desire – a shape that is decidedly *triangular*.

Perhaps a brief example here is in order. Imagine an incredibly young child given a toy with which to play. The child, at once, is delighted, intrigued and in abandon to the thrall of discovery. Now, in your mind's eye, imagine after a short interval of time, a second young child is brought into the room and given a second, different toy with which to play. What is the reaction of the first child? With exceedingly few exceptions, the first will discard her toy and reach toward the second, grasping after the new toy.

I'd like to suggest that a good many of us likely believe that at some point we have outgrown this pattern – but the far more likely truth is that we have become devilishly craftier in camouflaging it. We learn to desire through observance of another's desire. Our desire is shaped and developed through this *triangular dynamic*. Such is the basis of the rivalries, envies and conflicts that mar human cultures the world over.

Amid groupings of human beings, as competing desires rise to a breaking point, a fevered rush emerges in a search for someone to blame for the discord. Once identified, this one becomes the target of group furor. This one is selected for expulsion, to be cast out like a scapegoat, more often than not murdered to salvage some modicum of edgy peace – an uneasy truce if you will. This relative lack of conflict endures until the next frenzy of conflicting desire leads to a new search, a fresh victim. And on it goes.¹

On the [feast of the Holy Cross](#), believers in the gospel celebrate the victory of Jesus, Lamb of G-D. The innocent victim freely, fully stepping into the space of the scapegoat.

¹ For a more comprehensive, subtle and sustained analysis of this line of thought, consult the published works of Rene Girard, who has traced these anthropological mechanisms under the category of *mimetic desire*. For a theological development of Girard's work consult the published works of James Alison. See especially, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes*.

Repelled, expelled, executed, tossed onto the soaring pile of victims accumulated throughout human history. But no ordinary victim this. Rather a singular victor revealing the path out of this morass. The crucified and risen One teaches us to shape our desire after his manner of desire – a desire he learned from the Father in a love without beginning or end. A love without domination or subordination, without conflict or rivalry. A desire for the well-being of the other that they may flourish.

On the [feast of the Holy Cross](#), we confront the truth that Jesus dies on the cross not because the G-D he addressed as *Abba* is blood-thirsty, but rather it is we who are blood-thirsty. And blood-soaked. We are humbled before the selfless sacrifice of One intent upon getting us to see just how entrapped we are inside this insidious mechanism spewing violence, devouring victims. We are offered the gift of freedom from such enslavement, forgiveness for our prototypical sin, the sin of the world.

Such revelation is a profound gift to those of us living in the third decade of the 21st century. Take a moment to reflect upon the “foundations” to which we are incessantly invited to build a community of life. How so very much of our lives is built upon lazy, indeed deadly, designations of “us” and “them.” “You know how *they* are, don’t you? You know what *they’re* like, right?” And so, we purchase a cheap, paper-thin form of society built over against “them,” a counterfeit community complete with sham claims to sovereignty.

Such reflection is especially crucial during this time of relentless political and social discord. When perception of threats runs high, the field of potential scapegoats swells rapidly. Our current cultural morass affords disciples of Jesus the opportunity to witness to the [saving truth revealed in the cross of Christ](#) – that we need not be divided by the hunt for scapegoats assuaging our fears, anxieties and envies.

Rather, we are afforded the prospect of a deeper common life shorn of the rivalries and targeted victims that emerge from our effort to defend “our turf” over and against “them.” Such is the humble witness that disciples of Jesus are privileged to offer a world writhing in smoldering rage, relentless assaults, suffering sacrificial prey.

This day – the [Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross](#) – we resolve solidarity with the sacrificial victim who has ended sacrifice once and for all – the Victor over death and death-dealing, the Way to communion in G-D’s love.

Ecce Homo.

Behold! the man.

Behold! The Lamb of G-D.

Behold! The Lamb of G-D who takes away the sin of the world.