



SUNDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2025

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon ||
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross John 3: 13-17

The conversation with a friend started when we were stuck in traffic alongside an ambulance. She remarked on the symbol of the ambulance door – that of a snake coiled round a staff. She'd seen it on ambulances in other countries too. It's an ancient Greek symbol for medicine and healing.

"How? Why a snake?", she went on to ask, as we both jumped when the ambulance set off its siren to claim priority for its healing mission. This logo goes back a long way to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and healing. It was his symbol. Snakes shed their skins in a sign of renewal and fresh starts.

But it's not the only significance of this symbol. Our first reading at Mass today (The Book of Numbers 21: 4-9) tells the story of Moses asking our God's help when his people were being bitten by snakes. The Lord's remedy was to require the making of a bronze snake on a pole. Recovery from a snakebite required gazing at the bronze snake for you to live. Confronting the cause of the problem was the path to its being overcome and the way to healing and liberation.

Fast forward to today's Gospel to pick up the story. The sin of the world was confronted by Jesus taking on the powers of darkness and overcoming death, the consequences of sin, by his own dying and his resurrection. The central, enduring symbol of our Christian faith is the cross, our sign of victory, often held high for us to look at, the sign of our healing and liberation through Jesus' defeat of the grasping hold of sin and death. (I remember years ago after first hearing the 1970s musical Jesus Christ Superstar, being struck by the simple statement of the character playing Jesus, 'To conquer death you only have to die')

We should look at the Cross - at the same time a sign of shattering brutality, torture and pain, and now a celebration also of the defeat of evil and death's finality. Forgiveness and unending life are the gifts of our God who loves so much that he gave us his own Son who defeated death on its own ground. We needed rescuing. Need to be healed. To know wrong has been overcome by right. We have been saved by a God of mercy and compassion. We rightly celebrate today the freeing drama that took place on the Cross.

The Cross is part of our personal journey too. Last Sunday's Gospel talked of the cost of following Jesus. It carried the reminder that we too are to deny ourselves and take up our cross(es) daily and follow Jesus. We enter the mystery of suffering and the certainty of dying as we trace Jesus' path to forgiveness and freedom. If you have a crucifix or a cross, sit with it. Hold it. Stare at it. And begin to see over again the enormity of God's love. Re-visit what this means. Cherish the victory. Own the cost. It'll be a way of entering into the Church's and our celebration of the triumph of the Cross.



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A word from the Pope Francis

Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil. We 'let things be', or as others have decided they ought to be. Yet let us allow the Lord to rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord.

We are inspired to act by the example of those priests, religious, and laity who devote themselves to proclamation and to serving others with great fidelity, often at the risk of their lives and certainly at the cost of their comfort. Their testimony reminds us that, more than bureaucrats and functionaries, the Church needs passionate missionaries, enthusiastic about sharing true life. The saints surprise us, they confound us, because by their lives they urge us to abandon a dull and dreary mediocrity.

- Rejoice and Be Glad paras 137-8