



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Children's Liturgy of the Word The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Overview

Today, we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, reflecting on God's saving love revealed in Christ's Cross. Our readings illustrate this profound mystery, starting with the Israelites in the wilderness, who were bitten by serpents and found healing by looking at the bronze serpent raised by Moses—a prefiguration of Christ's Cross.

Pope Francis notes that "A serpent saved them from the serpents," highlighting that Christ's death heals us from our sins. The Gospel of John tells us that as Moses lifted the serpent, so must the Son of Man be lifted up for our salvation. This emphasizes God's immense love, offering eternal life through faith in Christ.

Saint Paul reminds us of Christ's humility and obedience, culminating in his death on the Cross, which leads to his exaltation as Lord. The Exaltation of the Holy Cross calls us to gaze upon the crucified Christ with faith and hope, finding salvation in our moments of weakness.

Let us embrace the Cross as the glorious sign of salvation, remembering that just as the Israelites were saved by the bronze serpent, we are saved through Christ on the Cross. May we find strength, hope, and the promise of eternal life in the Holy Cross.

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LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST READING

Numbers 21.4-9

Everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.

A reading from the book of Numbers.

In those days:

the people became impatient on the way.

They spoke against God and against Moses,

"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt
to die in the wilderness?

For there is no food and no water,
and we detest this miserable food."

Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people,
and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.

The people came to Moses and said,

"We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you;
pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us."

So Moses prayed for the people.

And the Lord said to Moses,

"Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole;
and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."

So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole;
and whenever a serpent bit someone,
that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The word of the Lord.

R. Do not forget the works of the Lord!

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old. **R.**

When God killed them, the people sought for him;
they repented and sought him earnestly.
They remembered that God was their rock,
the Most High God their redeemer. **R.**

But they flattered him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues.
Their heart was not steadfast toward him;
they were not true to his covenant. **R.**

Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity,
and did not destroy them;
often he restrained his anger,
and did not stir up all his wrath. **R.**

Christ humbled himself; therefore, God also highly exalted him.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians.

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord.

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"No one has ascended into heaven
except the one who descended from heaven,
the Son of Man.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The gospel of the Lord.

Objectives:

- To help children understand the reason that the Cross is important.

Key Words and Concepts for Children

- † God sent Jesus to show us his love.
- † Jesus dying on the Cross showed his amazing love and helped us reconcile with.
- † The Cross is a sign of hope and love—a reminder of how much Jesus did for us.
- † Love is the most important feeling God has for us.
- † Believe: To trust in Jesus and what he did for us.

Self-Reflection Questions

- † How do the readings deepen my understanding of God's infinite love and mercy for me?
- † What is the significance of the Cross in my life?

Background

Numbers 21:4-9: This event occurs during the Israelites' forty-year wandering in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, a period marked by divine provision, but also by frequent rebellion and divine discipline. The "way to the Red Sea" and "around the land of Edom" refer to their circuitous route to the Promised Land. The "poisonous serpents" (often translated as "fiery serpents" due to the burning sensation of their venom) were a divine judgment for the people's lack of faith and murmuring against God and his appointed leader, Moses.

Psalms 78 is a teaching psalm that recounts Israel's history from the Exodus through the establishment of the Davidic monarchy. It reminds us of God's faithfulness and the people's repeated unfaithfulness, highlighting the lessons learned (or often not learned) from their past.

Philippians 2:6-11: This passage, often referred to as the "Christ Hymn," describes the profound humility and obedience of Jesus Christ. It was written while he was imprisoned and is an exhortation to the Philippian Christians to live in humility and unity, using Christ as the supreme example of self-giving love and service. It is likely an early Christian hymn or creedal statement.

John 3:13-17: This passage is part of a nighttime conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and Jewish leader who seeks understanding. Jesus uses familiar imagery from the Old Testament, specifically the bronze serpent, to explain his mission and identity. When Jesus talks about being "lifted up," he refers to his crucifixion on the Cross and his later glorification. This "lifting up" is how salvation is offered. It clearly states that "whoever believes in him may have eternal life," emphasizing that faith is necessary to respond to God's saving act through Christ.

The key message is: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." This highlights that God's motivation for sending Christ is not revenge, but a deep, unconditional love for humanity. Jesus explains that his goal is not to condemn the world but to save it. The Cross represents the greatest example of God's loving desire to save us.

The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

After the opening prayer, when all are seated, the leaders come forward and stand facing the altar.

Dismissal

Priest: Children, when we follow Jesus, we follow his Cross. Today, we thank Jesus for saving us through the Cross.

When most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the place of the celebration. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the location of the celebration, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome

The leaders assist the children in sitting and preparing. **Begin with the Sign of the Cross.** Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may say the following prayer in these or similar words.

Let us pray:

Pause for 5 – 10 seconds

Dear God, thank you for bringing us together today. Open our hearts and ears to hear your special message of love. Help us to understand how much you love us through Jesus and his Cross. Amen.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Invite the children to listen to the readings. Proclaiming all the readings is unnecessary; however, the Gospel is required.

Liturgy of the Word

Adapted Liturgy of the Word

FIRST READING

Numbers 21.4-9

Everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.

A reading from the book of Numbers.

The people became impatient in the desert.

and spoke against God and against Moses,

"Why have you brought us out of Egypt

to die in the wilderness?

For there is no food and no water,

and we detest this miserable food."

Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people,

and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.

The people came to Moses and said,

"We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you;

pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us."

So Moses prayed for the people.

And the Lord said to Moses,

"Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole;

and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."

So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole;

and whenever a serpent bit someone,

that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The word of the Lord.

R. Do not forget the Lord!

Listen to my teaching;
I will tell you things from of old. **R.**

The people sinned, but they repented.
They remembered that God was their redeemer. **R.**

He forgave them
and he did not stir up his anger. **R.**

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians.

Jesus, who is God,
did not take advantage of his equality with God,
but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant,
being born in a human body.
He was obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
God highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
The word of the Lord.

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"No one has ascended into heaven
except the one who descended from heaven,
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And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
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that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions. An excellent place to begin is the question:

What did you hear? *Allow the children a few minutes to respond.*

Today is a special day because we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

"Exaltation" means to lift up and honour something very special. *(Hold up the cross).*

Think about the people in the desert. They were bitten by snakes, and they were dying. But when they looked at the bronze snake on the pole, they were saved! They lived!

Why did the people get sick? *(They complained, they sinned).*

What did God tell Moses to do to help them? *(Make a bronze snake on a pole).*

What did the people have to do to be healed? *(Look at the snake).*

Now think about us. Sometimes we make mistakes, we do things that are not kind, or we don't listen to God. These are like the "bites" of sin that hurt us and separate us from God. But God loves us so much! He sent Jesus, his Son, to be "lifted up" on the Cross for us.

What did Jesus say about himself and the bronze snake? *(He must be "lifted up" too).*

What is the most important reason God sent Jesus? *(Because God loved the world so much!).*

What happens if we believe in Jesus? *(We get eternal life, we live forever with God).*

When we look at the Cross, it's like looking at Jesus. It reminds us that Jesus died for our sins, and because of his great love, we can be forgiven and live forever with God. The Cross is not a sad thing; it's a sign of God's amazing love and power to save us!

So, when you see a cross, remember:

- † God loves you very, very much!
- † Jesus died on the Cross to save you.
- † If you believe in Jesus, you will live forever with God!

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith. Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who gave his life for us?

All: I believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: I believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. The leader may need to repeat and paraphrase the petition and conclude it with the cue for the response: we pray. All respond to each petition by saying, "Lord, hear our prayer." Sample intercessions are below.

Leader: Now let's offer our prayers to God, who loves us so much.
The response is: Lord, hear our prayer.

1. For our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, and all bishops, priests, and deacons, that they may always teach us about God's great love shown on the Cross, we pray to the Lord:
All: Lord, hear our prayer.
2. For all children around the world, that they may know how much Jesus loves them and find hope in his Cross, we pray to the Lord:
All: Lord, hear our prayer.
3. For anyone who is sick or sad, that they may feel God's healing love and comfort, we pray to the Lord:
All: Lord, hear our prayer.
4. For our families and friends, that we may always remember God's love and try to be humble and kind like Jesus, we pray to the Lord:
All: Lord, hear our prayer.
5. The leader may invite other intercessions from the children.

Leader: God, our loving Father, hear these prayers we offer with faith in your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever and ever.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and think about what they have heard and are now doing. Be mindful of children having difficulty finding their families.

DID YOU KNOW?

LITURGY AS A WHOLE PERSON EVENT

37 *"In view of the nature of the liturgy as an activity of the entire person and in view of the psychology of children, participation by means of gestures and posture should be strongly encouraged in Masses with children, with due regard for age and local custom."* (Directory for Masses with Children, 33)

38 Paragraph 14 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican Council:

"The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Peter 2.9, see 2.4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

"In the reform and promotion of the liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else. For it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit."

This is eminently important for children. Children do not naturally sit still for long periods of time. The younger the child, the shorter the "sit time." Thus, the nature of children as active beings and the nature of liturgy as an embodied event wonderfully coincide.

DO have the children move, sing, and use all of their bodies to pray.

DON'T have the children sit still for the entire liturgy of the word.

Celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with Children, Guidelines for Practice, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, ON. Copyright © Conacan Inc., 2006, paragraphs 37, 38.

Liturgy adapted for Children.

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Acknowledgments:

LECTIONARY SUNDAYS AND SOLEMNITIES

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