

**FEAST OF THE HOLY CROSS**  
**Year A     September 14, 2014**

**Theme: Confronting our Fear**

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In the Twelve Step programs of **recovery from addiction**, the very first step requires the person to name the addiction.

*We admitted we were powerless over gambling – that our lives had become unmanageable.*

*We admitted we were powerless over drugs – that our lives had become unmanageable.*

Likewise, there is the familiar introduction at the meetings of the various Anonymous meetings: Hello, my name is blank and I am an alcoholic or my name is blank and I am an over-eater.

The important factor here is the **open and honest admission** of the addiction:

- no hiding from oneself or others, perhaps after years of such hiding;
- no excuses, perhaps after hundreds of excuses;
- no more lies, after an untold number of lies.

Recovery from addiction cannot happen without such brutal and complete honesty and facing of the truth, especially to oneself.

Nor can we **overcome our deepest fears** without confronting them head on.

Witness that **creepy little story** we heard from Hebrew scriptures this week.

I say creepy because hate to even talk about it because I have such a fear of snakes I'm afraid by talking about them, I'll dream about them tonight.

At any rate the Hebrew people are **complaining and murmuring** about Moses and this long journey he has led them on;

---“why didn't we just stay in Egypt we they at least had plenty of water;”

---and “we're so sick of this food, every day the same thing.”

---“when are we going to get there and be done with this wandering in the desert?”

The **complaining slithered like snakes** set loose through the community, biting people with their deadly venom of negativity.

Only when **Moses named** them as deadly snakes and put its image up on a pole for everyone to see did they realize what their complaining and murmuring was doing to the morale and spirit of the community.

Only then did they stop and did the community survive.

To this obscure story buried in the pages of the Hebrew Bible did the **Gospel writer John** turn when he wanted to speak to our human fear of death and have us look at the body of Jesus Christ raised up on the Cross.

Look at that which we fear the most: **death**.

Look at that which we cannot control.

Look to the one who can deliver you from your fear of death.

**“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so too, will the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.”**

Everyone who looked on the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses was saved from the bite of the serpent.

Everyone who looks on the lifted up Son of Man and believes in him will have eternal life.

In our **Western or Latin Rite** of the Catholic Church, in particular, the bodily image of the suffering and crucified Christ on the Cross has been historically important.

For the Eastern and Orthodox churches the image of Christ is usually painted in icon form.

Our Protestant brothers and sisters almost always use a bare cross to signify Christ's resurrection.

But in Roman Catholic Churches the image is of the crucifix with a corpus, or body, of the suffering and dying Christ affixed to the cross.

This image, as here in this **dominating crucifix** which has been erected in our church, forces us to look at death every time we come into this room.

Like Moses' brass snake on a pole, **the crucifix confronts us with our fear of death** and by seeing how the Lord Jesus endured his death with trust and hope in his Father we can face our own death with hope of eternal life.

As **macabre and gross** as it may seem to have an executed dead person portrayed in all its starkness before us, this is precisely the image which will confront us with our deepest fear.

And as the French philosopher Rousseau wrote: "The one who says he is not afraid of death, lies."

But the Cross of Jesus Christ stands **now as sign of Triumph and Victory!**

Christ gave his Body and shed his Blood on that Cross but that Cross could not and did not hold him.

And now that cross is no longer the sign of our greatest fear,

it is the sign of Christ's victory over death.

It is the emblem promising of eternal life.

It is our monogram of hope.