



Ask, Father James:

Was the Cross of Jesus ever Found?

Throughout the early history of the Church, Christians devoted themselves to celebrating the Holy Eucharist, to prayers, to fellowship and the Apostles teachings (Acts 2:42). However, Christians persecutions drove the early church underground into the catacombs. Whenever Mass was not going on, they painted inscriptions of the Holy Cross of Jesus on the walls of the catacombs and they meditated on the suffering of Jesus Christ and looked forward to their salvation and redemption through the power of the blood of Jesus shed upon the cross.

Then it so happen that Constantine (r. 306-370), the Roman Emperor who was once a great persecutor of the Church and Christians had series of visions wherein he saw the cross of Jesus (*chirho*) as the only way to achieve victory and peace in the empire. He had the sign of the cross engraved and welded to all the spears and shields of his army and indeed victory was attained. Through Constantine's famous vision, the Cross became the one symbol of the Christian church and he declared Christianity as the only religion of the Roman Empire.

In 326, Helena (c. 250- 330), the mother of Constantine undertook a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Golgotha in Jerusalem for her son's conversion. With the help of her son, Constantine, excavation projects were undertaken which eventually led to the discovery of the True Cross - the cross upon which Christ was crucified. After the death of Jesus, at Golgotha, the cross had been thrown into a hole in the ground, along with those of the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus. On arriving at the Holy Land 300 years later, the Empress, St. Helena ended up finding the three crosses. To find out which one was Jesus', the bishop of Jerusalem had an idea: he made a sick woman, previously incurable, touch the wood, and upon touching one of the three she was healed straight away. Helena had no doubt at all: she found Jesus' cross! She immediately and promptly ordered the building of a church where it was discovered – which she called the Church of the Resurrection – and she then set off to go back to Rome. According to Christian tradition, the relic was well preserved until 614 when the cross disappeared into the hands of the Persians. But in 630, Heraclius, the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, had a resounding victory over the Persians, and triumphantly returned a part of the Cross to Jerusalem. This event is commemorated by the Church on September 14 as the feast of “The Triumph of the Cross” or “The Exaltation of the Holy Cross.” Since the fourth century, people went up to Jerusalem to venerate it and pray before the relic asking for healing or miraculous favours

Later, in the sixth-century Saint Radegund, (an insatiable collector of relics) made a quest for a relic of the True Cross. After founding a monastery for women in Poitiers, she begged the imperial court at Constantinople for a piece of the True Cross that had been recovered by Helena, Constantine's mother, two centuries earlier. Justin II and Sophia granted her request and Radegund's messengers returned to Poitiers with the relic and many gifts. Cities with the true relic became greater pilgrimage destinations By becoming host to the relic, Poitiers would enter an elite pilgrimage group of cities—including Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, as well as closer cities such as Vienne. The Cross is the emblematic sign of Christian authenticity. On Good Friday the centrality and instrumentality of the Cross is venerated, "behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the saviour of the world." We should never look at the Cross without being reminded of the resurrection, for the death and resurrection of Christ cannot be separated, and both are part of the mysterious purpose of God.

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