

My thanks to everyone who came for our town hall meeting last week. We heard about one plan that might answer our needs. Then, we heard a number of other ideas and questions. Not everyone had the same opinion, which was fine. Our renovation committee meets again in a couple of weeks, and we'll revise our proposal at that time.

Anytime you talk about a church building, people feel strongly about it. Even when opinions divide, one thing is always held in common: Church buildings are symbols of what we believe.

The cross is another symbol that Christians hold dear. The gospels don't say what happened to Jesus' cross after he died. Nobody referred to it for hundreds of years. But by the end of the fourth century, pilgrims in Jerusalem venerated what they believed were the remains of the true cross, and on Good Friday, when people in the fourth century kissed those relics, two deacons stood guard to make sure no one bit into the wood to carry splinters home. Was this really the cross of Christ? We don't know. According to a later legend, St. Helena found the remains of 3 crosses in Jerusalem. She ordered up 3 dead bodies. Servants placed them on the crosses, and one corpse sprung back to life. They decided the cross touching that body belonged to Christ. That's the legend, anyway.

In the book of Numbers today, the people of Israel are attacked by serpents as they cross the desert. God tells Moses to erect a bronze serpent on a pole. All who looked on it were healed. That bronze serpent foreshadowed the cross: All those who look at Jesus lifted up will be saved from eternal death.

We call today's feast the exaltation of the cross, recalling the dedication of the church built over Calvary in Jerusalem. The story of Helena and the 3 corpses is probably not true, and in the 300 years between the death of Jesus and the time when a cross was put up for public veneration, anything could have happened. Many individuals, groups and shrines claim to have pieces of the original cross, but any such relic is unfortunately suspicious.

In the end, though, it doesn't matter. Today's feast recalls that Jesus became like us. He associated with sinners without committing sin. He underwent the pain of death resisting all temptation. He died for us, so that we who are sinners can look upon his cross in faith and be saved. We Christians keep crosses in our churches, in our homes and in our pockets. They bring us the good news that Jesus saves.