

The Story of St. Helen of the Cross and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

One of the most venerated and precious relics in Roman Catholic tradition—a sliver of wood from the cross on which Christ died on the first Good Friday—has been quietly on display since 1978 in St. Helen of the Cross, Eloy AZ.

The fragment, one of hundreds of what are called “relics of the True Cross” worldwide, was found in Jerusalem in the third century by the parish’s patroness St Helena and came to Eloy in 1978 accompanied by a Document of Authentication from The Franciscan Order, Capuchin Preserve of the Relics of the True Cross and ascribed with the signature and seal from the Curia General in Rome in 1955.

Here is the story of how St. Helen found the True Cross of Jesus and why we celebrate the Feast Day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross annually on September 14.

When the Body of Jesus was removed from the Cross, to prevent His followers from finding it, the Cross was thrown in a ditch and then covered with stones and earth.

In the year 312 A.D., almost 300 years later, while Roman Emperor Constantine, who had not yet converted to Christianity, was in combat with Maxentius for the throne of the Roman Empire, he prayed to the Lord God of the Christians to help him in his battle. In answer to his prayer, a sign appeared in the sky. A luminous cross was seen with the words "BY THIS SIGN YOU WILL CONQUER" (in Latin, "IN HOC SIGNO VINCES") inscribed on it.

Constantine won a decisive battle over Maxentius. Indebted to God for his victory, Constantine commanded that the Sign of Christianity be placed on the Roman standards and on the shields of all the soldiers.

After the ground had been excavated to a considerable depth, three crosses were found . . .

Then, on September 14, 326, Emperor Constantine’s mother, Empress Helena, found in Jerusalem the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified. The legend of the story of the discovery of the True Cross begins when Constantine appointed his mother Empress Helena as Augusta Imperatrix, and gave her unlimited access to the imperial treasury to locate the relics of the Christian tradition. In 326-28 AD, Empress Helena, at age 80,

undertook a pilgrimage to Palestine. Upon visiting the holy places in Palestine, she was guided to the site of the Crucifixion by an aged Jew who had inherited traditional knowledge as to its location. After the ground had been excavated to a considerable depth, three crosses were unearthed, as well as the superscription placed over the Savior's head on the Cross, and the nails with which He had been crucified. The Cross of the Lord was distinguished from the other two by laying the crosses on a dead youth who was revived by the touch of the third cross.

To commemorate the finding of the Holy Cross, Constantine dedicated two Churches upon Calvary, "Anastasis" and "Golgotha," both within the precincts of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Beginning in those days, the Feast of the "Exaltation of the Holy Cross" was commemorated annually on May 3.

In 614, Chosroes II, the King of Persia, invaded Syria and Palestine, at which time he carried away many of the great treasures of Jerusalem, including the relic of the True Cross. In 629, Emperor Heraclius of Constantinople marched into Persia and recaptured the True Cross, seeing to it that Heraclius piously bring it back to Jerusalem while being clothed in sackcloth of penance and barefoot. On **September 14**, the Sacred Cross was restored to its place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Church of Rome Adopts Feast Day

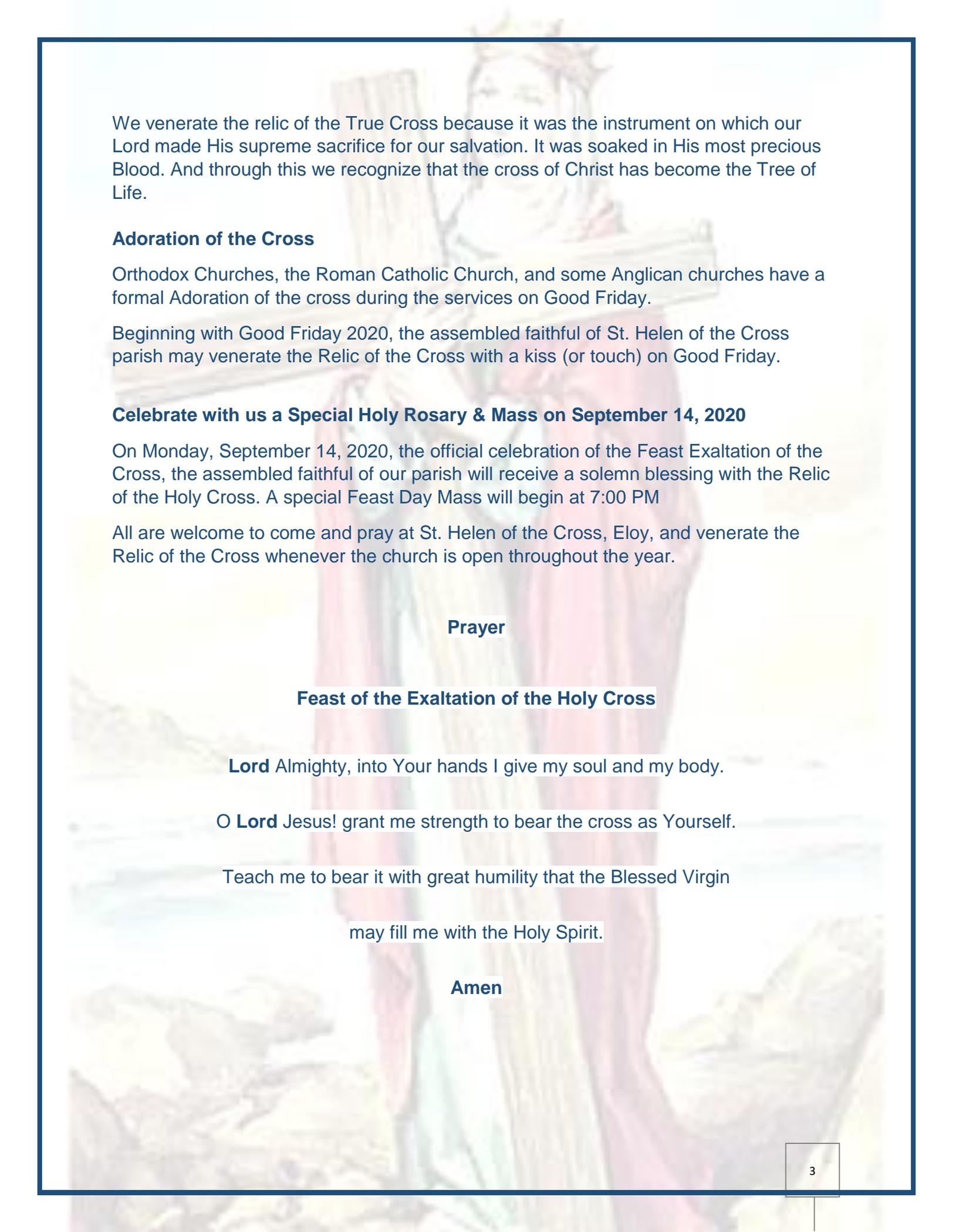
To commemorate this victory, in the seventh century A.D., the Church of Rome adopted the "**Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**" on **September 14**.

Today one may visit the Basilica Church of Santa Croce in Jerusalemme (The Holy Cross in Jerusalem), located in Rome, in which a sizable portion of the Holy Cross is enshrined along with numerous other associated relics of the Passion, including a large portion of the sign that had been placed on the Cross saying "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".

Document of Authentication of the Precious Relic

Over the centuries, tiny pieces of the precious Relic have found their way to various churches around the world for veneration.

On March 12, 1978, a piece of the precious Relic together with a Document of Authentication of a First Class Relic of the Wood of the Holy Cross was received by the parish of St. Helen of the Cross, Eloy AZ from the Office of the Postulator General, Brother Bernadine, O.F.M. Cay, The Franciscan Order, Capuchin Preserver of the Relics of the True Cross. (The original Authentication document is on display adjacent to the Relic.)



We venerate the relic of the True Cross because it was the instrument on which our Lord made His supreme sacrifice for our salvation. It was soaked in His most precious Blood. And through this we recognize that the cross of Christ has become the Tree of Life.

Adoration of the Cross

Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and some Anglican churches have a formal Adoration of the cross during the services on Good Friday.

Beginning with Good Friday 2020, the assembled faithful of St. Helen of the Cross parish may venerate the Relic of the Cross with a kiss (or touch) on Good Friday.

Celebrate with us a Special Holy Rosary & Mass on September 14, 2020

On Monday, September 14, 2020, the official celebration of the Feast Exaltation of the Cross, the assembled faithful of our parish will receive a solemn blessing with the Relic of the Holy Cross. A special Feast Day Mass will begin at 7:00 PM

All are welcome to come and pray at St. Helen of the Cross, Eloy, and venerate the Relic of the Cross whenever the church is open throughout the year.

Prayer

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Lord Almighty, into Your hands I give my soul and my body.

O **Lord** Jesus! grant me strength to bear the cross as Yourself.

Teach me to bear it with great humility that the Blessed Virgin

may fill me with the Holy Spirit.

Amen

"She worshipped not the wood, but the King, Him who hung on the wood"

- St. Ambrose said of St. Helen



Additional Facts About St. Helen of the Cross

Sainthood

St. Helen is considered by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches as a saint, famed for her piety. Her feast day in the Roman Catholic Church fall on August 18. She is the patron saint of archaeologists (or discoveries). The names "Saint Eleanor" and Saint Eleanora" are usually synonymous for St. Helen.

Additional Relic Discoveries

In 325 C.E. Helena during Her pilgrimage to Jerusalem to find the True Cross was also on a mission to find and gather other Christian relics, by her son Emperor Constantine, who had recently declared Rome as a Christian city.

She also according to legend found the nails of the crucifixion. To use their miraculous power to aid her son, Helena allegedly had one placed on Constantine's helmet, and another in the bridle of his horse. Helena left Jerusalem and the Eastern province's in 327 to return to Rome, bring with her large parts of the True Cross She found as well as other relics which were stored in Her palace's private chapel where they can be still seen today. Her palace was later converted into the Santa Croce in Jerusalem.

According the Western Christian tradition, Helena acquired the Holy Tunic on Her trip to Jerusalem and had it sent to Trier. The robe is housed in the Cathedral of Their and its existence has been well documented since the twelfth century.