

THE LAW OF THE CROSS

I thank you for inviting me to celebrate this Holy Mass. My name is Bishop Philip Egan and I am the Bishop of Portsmouth, England, which is 70 miles south-west of London on the south coast. I'm here for the Lonergan Symposium. Its topic *Liberated by God and His Church* is very apt for this splendid feastday, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Let me say a word about the Readings. In that 1stR from the Book of Numbers, fiery serpents were biting the people, causing sickness and death. In His mercy, God told Moses to fashion a bronze serpent on a pole so that anyone bitten need only look to it for healing. In this way, God turned the cause of suffering into the very means of healing, a typology fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Saviour, raised high on the Cross for our salvation; as Jesus foretold, *the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert so that everyone who believes in Him might have eternal life*. The Cross of Christ symbolises human sin, suffering and death, evil and all that's wrong with our world, yet transformed by the resurrection, the Cross of Christ is now the very means of our salvation. For when we look to Jesus, dying on the Cross, laying down His life for us, Blood and water flowing from His pierced side, He draws us into a personal-passionate relationship with Himself and transforms us through the healing balm of the sacraments, especially the Blessed Eucharist. In this way, sin, suffering and death, evil and all that's wrong, are overturned by Love such that there's now nothing in Him we cannot face. As St. John Chrysostom said in yesterday's Divine Office: *If Christ is with me, whom shall I fear?*

Fr. Bernard Lonergan, one of the greatest Catholic thinkers of 20C, whose thought I find invaluable as a bishop, was much influenced by St. Augustine, who once famously said: *The human heart is restless until it rests in God*. If we want to be happy in life, we must find God and friendship with Him: a simple message, that as part of the new evangelisation, every Christian must attractively communicate to the drifting, searching, addicted people of today's secular culture. Lonergan explored human desire, shewing how the built-in mechanism by which we find happiness and God is through self-transcendence. He saw this as the universal Law of the Cross: that by giving we receive, by denying self we find self and that by laying down our lives we reach heaven. This Law was revealed in triumph on Calvary. Indeed, the Cross reveals not only the way to human happiness, but the Heart of God Himself, F, S and HSp. God too is self-transcending love, and the universe, a fruit of His Self-transcendence, is made in His image.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world*. As we celebrate today's feast, we are all aware how badly this fragile and troubled world of 2014 is in need of the salvation Christ has won for us. What gives hope is that every Mass re-presents the Sacrifice of Calvary: Jesus lays down His life, for you and for me, to push forward the world's redemption. So in this Mass, let's turn to Him with confidence to pray for all our needs, those of the Church and of the world. Assisted by the presence and prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of our Cross, let us pray that the grace of this Mass will make us self-transcending persons, ready and willing to lay down our lives for others, especially for the poor and the most needy. Indeed, *let us go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*.