

## The Cross

Today the Church celebrates Holy Cross Day. This commemorates the dedication on this day in the year 335 of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The tradition is that Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, found on that site a cross believed to be the very cross of Christ, and that she then caused the great basilica to be built there.

There is thus a strong link both with York and our own parish of St Helen with St Martin. And both Helena and Constantine are depicted in the medieval west window in St Helen's Church. I have been privileged to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre twice. Unlike the calm oases of our churches in York it is a very busy and quite noisy place.

The cross is the central symbol of our Christian faith. It is perhaps misleading that many of the crosses and crucifixes in our churches are quite beautiful objects. For the cross was an instrument of condemnation, humiliation, cruelty pain and death. Nothing at all nice about that.

That is the continuing relevance of the cross today in our world in which cruelty, pain and death are still ever-present. On the cross we believe that God through his Son Jesus Christ shared in our pain and took upon himself the pain and the sin of the world. That is a message of great hope and reassurance. We are not left alone. God knows our pain and suffering and transforms it.

For the cross is not a symbol of defeat but of triumph, of victory. For the crucifixion and death of our Lord was not the end. It was followed by his resurrection from the dead. The cross is thus a reminder of his victory over sin and death. And so the fact that the crosses and crucifixes in our church are beautiful objects may not be such a bad thing after all.

The cross is both a reminder that God shares in our pain and a great sign of hope. And that is a very powerful message for our world today. As we heard in our reading just now, the Gospel for Holy Cross Day (John 3.13-17), through the cross of Christ, through his death and resurrection we see God's love in action. We see God's gift of eternal life, life in all its fullness.

Hope is perhaps often in rather short supply. The task of Christians is to make known, not least in situations of suffering, conflict and injustice, the confident hope in the overriding love and justice of God. And for that we give thanks.

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