

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Last week we celebrated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which unlike other feasts which celebrate people (e.g. St. Francis of Assisi) this feast celebrates a great mystery, which is the finding of the relics of the True Cross by St. Helena in Jerusalem in AD 326.

In our world we find the idea of relics and miraculous discoveries perhaps more challenging than previous generations. We are taught to subject everything to scrutiny, to test if it is true. Such is life when we put great store on the prestige of Science.

There are two things that can be said about this. First of all, what is true is always true, whether I like it or not. The truth – or otherwise – of a statement does not depend upon me – nor does it depend upon the capacity of my brainpower, limited as it is. So it's funny, in a way, to insist that 'unless I can subject something to an analytical test it's not true' is a false start. I may (or may not) be able to discover the truth about something, but perhaps this should not be the sole gauge of what is true.

The second is this. Even in a world where we rely so heavily on Science and Technology, in fact the mode of knowledge we use most frequently is Faith. I personally have not checked out the laws of gravity to my satisfaction, but I know that Isaac Newton did. However, to trust that Isaac Newton is not a wicked fool trying to deceive me means that I must trust him and those who followed him. I must have faith in him. So it is with almost everything I have learnt. I trust that I am not being deceived, that someone is passing on the truth to me. I have faith in them.

And that is where truth and credibility meet. I believe a truth claim because I subject it to my own brainpower and find it credible. Whereas, when it comes to relics and suchlike, I find it hard to believe that what people say about them is true, because it seems unlikely on a statistical analysis. Perhaps in such circumstances I should consider who is making the truth claim. If it is God – and indirectly, in the case of relics and miracles, that is precisely who guarantees the truth claim – then why should I doubt Him?

If God is all good and cannot sin, then there is no way He could deceive me. Furthermore, if He loves me, He will always seek to do what is best for me and reveal things that I need to know. So, even though we may think the circumstances of the discovery of the relics of the True Cross are difficult to believe, we have the guarantee from God that it is as described.

The mystery of the Cross – and the physical, tangibility of the wood of the Cross is such a powerful aid to our understanding of the Christian vocation it is no wonder that God's Providence would preserve and reveal the very relics for us to venerate and celebrate today. Because one of the things we need no-one else to tell us is that life contains multiple crosses – or rather – our own cross is tailor-made to our specification.