

**September 14 - Feast of the Triumph of the Cross**  
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Numbers 21:4-9	Moses makes a serpent of bronze and mounts it on a pole that serves to heal the people who've suffered from snake bites.
Psalms 78:1-2, 34-35, 36-37, 38	They remembered that God was their rock, God Most High, their redeemer.
Philippians 2:6-11	Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
John 3:13-17	And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Of all the strange, obscure, odd – even shocking – passages in Holy Scripture, today's first reading from Numbers has to be in first place for weirdness. Imagine! The People of Israel in that inhospitable desert are being attacked and struck by desert vipers; many are dying soon after being bitten. Moses is in a panic. All have been disloyal to God and soon all will die. But the Lord calls Moses and gives him a remedy for all who have been bitten: make a viper or serpent of BRONZE and raise it up on a pole before the people, and all who have been struck and dying, who look now at the raised up serpent of bronze, will be cured and saved! The very thing that was poisoning and killing them was now going to save them! “A bit of the hair of the dog that bit you.”

But wait a minute: we have medical miracles from our own scientific era that run a close analogy: inoculations! You remember as a kid getting a bit of the hair of the dog that was probably going to bite you, in a form of a shot of the very disease that soon was probably going to bite most of us: smallpox. The next day a doughnut shaped welt appeared where we got the shot – a tiny bit of that dread disease itself. And how about rabies shots? Some of these shots give us a small taste of the disease itself-- a tiny price to pay for escaping the terrible diseases themselves. Moses wasn't pushing advanced science, but he was on to something. To overcome most of the evils we face in this life as individuals, and especially as societies, we first have to take an unblinking long look at the evils themselves – usually not a pleasant task, but ESSENTIAL.

St. John the Evangelist in today's Gospel passage picks up on this theme from Numbers, and what does he do but put Jesus up on that pole! The pole now is the Cross. And Jesus, not the bronze serpent, is up there on it. Why? For several profound reasons, but certainly one is for us to see what evil results in: death. And death of the very one who came to save us all by taking on the very evils and their results (death). So we look on the Cross, and Jesus on it, to overcome the evils slowly killing us individually---and more importantly, to see the evils that are killing peoples, societies, and the world itself!

What are some of these death dealing evils today? Plenty: AIDS! Abortion on demand! Rampaging and fast deepening gulfs between the small class of very rich and the huge mass of the poor. The long and violent wars to “bring peace.” The violent and centuries old selfish use of the world's gifts, giving us global warming and worse; most now know that a continuation of such profligate misuse will kill our globe SOON! Let's look on the results today up there on the Cross. How about those vast hordes of people looking in from the outside upon the banquet of life, excluded by severe and often unjust anti-immigration policies in our shrinking world?

We've got to lift up these evils on our Cross and look long and hard at them, and see what they are doing to all of us, and indeed to our whole one and only planet. Yes, I agree with you: these evils go way beyond our individual efforts to combat them or reduce them even a fraction. So, we must think globally, yes, politically. What can be done right here and now in our home

country, which has only a short time to remain rich and powerful. In short, we as U.S. Americans in this election year — this very “watershed” year – as we look at the Cross – what do our political parties and top candidates propose to do about these deadly issues? Our senators, congresspersons, mayors – our candidates for president? We are not used to “mixing religion and politics.” But much of what politics should be concerned with are religious issues in the deepest sense. The time has come – indeed, may be leaving us forever behind – when we must act quickly, responsibly and effectively, POLITICALLY and SOCIALLY.

Yes, these issues, these realities, these facts are up there on the Cross with Jesus if we but look up. Of course, as with overcoming all evil and sin, hard living and some suffering is going to be involved for all of us. For instance, if one stands up to be counted in battling abortion politically, individually or socially, we will have to suffer the pain of being considered narrow, “unscientific,” and “fanatical.” The battle against AIDS will mean heavier taxes and perhaps a more stringent lifestyle for all of us. And our poor old globe: we all will have to tighten our belts.

Well, this is an important election year--certainly the most important for over half a century. Many analysts are seeing it to be a “turning point” year for our nation, our world even. Let’s get to know who we are voting for and WHY!

Let’s look at the Cross of Jesus on this Feast Day and long beyond, and ACT!

### **For more information:**

Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world,” a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:  
[www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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