

Weekly Message from Fr William for the Fifth Sunday of Lent 2022

Dear People of St Mary's,

The finding of the True Cross: In AD 327 Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem began excavations near the city to pinpoint the site of Christ's crucifixion. In the course of these excavations the wood of a cross was recovered that Macarius determined to be the wood of the 'True Cross', the cross on which Christ was crucified. After this, a service of veneration of this wood from the True Cross was held in Jerusalem each year. The faithful approached it in turn, and the priest said the words 'Behold, the Wood of the Cross', and the faithful would touch the wood as an act of veneration, sometimes with their lips.

On a pilgrimage to Jerusalem Saint Helena (Emperor Constantine's Mum) witnessed the service of veneration, and brought it back to Rome, so that by the 5th century we have an account describing this same service of veneration in Rome that was taking place in Jerusalem. Since then this service of veneration on Good Friday has become widespread, and eventually universal throughout the Catholic Church, using wood that replicates the wood of the True Cross.

Some churches claim to possess a fragment of the True Cross for veneration on Good Friday. In a sense it doesn't really matter. On Good Friday all wood becomes holy by association. It's why we 'touch wood'. It is the chosen organic material, chosen by the Saviour, to be the instrument of his death, and the instrument of our salvation.

But just to get a bit closer to Christ and closer to the origins of this Good Friday act of veneration, I thought at least we can try and get hold of a cross for St Mary's that is made of Olive Wood from the Holy Land. I'm hoping it will arrive in time for Good Friday. 'Touch wood'. As you come up for veneration, you're at liberty to touch, kiss, bow to the cross, whichever you feel most comfortable with or most moved to. This year I'll be using alcohol wipes between each contact.

Ukraine: first Sunday of March 80 to 90 of us stayed back after Mass to pray for the conversion of the Russian Security Council and its leader. The following Sunday it was more than 100. Then last week, quite by chance, I came across a report in *Euromaidan Press* that a member of this 12 person council is edging towards acknowledgement of the aggression against Ukraine. She is Valentina Matviyenko, Chair of the Federal Council, and one of the 12 for whom we prayed. She said in a statement: 'Undermining the sovereignty of states and the subordination of their domestic and foreign policy has become the reality of our time...only one step remains to acknowledge who precisely undermined Ukraine's state sovereignty.' Not explicit, no names mentioned, maybe deliberately ambiguous, but nevertheless I'm taking this as hopeful/encouraging. Let's keep praying along with the thousands of others who will also be praying for the conversion of the Russian Security Council, that they will have the same courage we might be seeing here in Valentina Matviyenko.



Fifth Sunday of Lent, 3 april 2022