

**Chaplain's Assembly – Father Philip Murphy SSC**  
**18<sup>th</sup> September 2014**  
**“The Triumph of the Cross – Seeing Jesus”**

**Reading: John 3:13-17**

You do not have to go far to find Spirituality at the Cinema. You do not need to look hard in order to find images of Jesus in films.

On the surface they may be ordinary films which have nothing to do with God at all, but if you look more closely you can often find some strong religious themes.

There are those which are a bit more obvious. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was a book written by CS Lewis about Jesus Christ and the resurrection.

The Lion Aslan represents Jesus, who at the end of the film is killed and then is resurrected, coming back to new life.

But then there are plenty of others:

Neo, in the 1999 film of “The Matrix” is spoken of as someone’s “Own personal Jesus Christ.”

In the 1995 film Braveheart, Mel Gibson, the main character, is also seen as a Christ-like figure, here in a scene which is like the trial of Jesus. Jesus was asked about his Kingdom by Pilate and here Braveheart is asked a similar question. Both keep silence.

At the start of the film Prometheus an alien creature drinks a liquid and disintegrates, allowing new life.

And in Superman Returns, Superman is seen as a Christ like figure, sent to save the people. At the very start of film we hear the Father sending the Son.

Of course we have to be very careful in what we say and hear. Most of these characters are not Jesus Christ, but there is often part of them which is Christ-like, part of them which reflect some of the Gospel stories.

So here we are, two thousand years after the birth of Christ, and Hollywood and other film makers still use parts of the story of Jesus, of the relationship between God and Man as a focus of their films. Maybe the producers are trying to understand what truth is.

But it isn't just after the birth of Jesus that we see this, we also see it before the birth of Jesus. Characters who point us to Jesus and give us an image of what is to come.

If you were listening to yesterday's reading, you may have wondered what it had to do with the Cross of Jesus. It was a reading about Moses who lived thousands of years ago.

About how he was leading his people through the desert. They were all complaining because they didn't like the food that was being provided, and they kept being bitten by snakes. Then God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole and whoever was bitten should look at the bronze snake and they would be healed.

What on earth has that to do with the Cross of Jesus?

What is has to do with it is that it is an IMAGE of the future.

It is what we call a prefiguring. PREFIGURE. Pre, meaning before and figure, a likeness. So this stick in a desert is a prefiguring of the Cross.

And perhaps in this picture you can see why it prefigures the cross. The people would look up at the snake on the pole and be healed, just as we look to the Cross of Jesus, who heals us, loves us, forgives us and promises us eternal life.



Moses and the Brass Serpent, by Judith Mehr, © 1996 IRI

As we heard in our reading today, Jesus said that just like Moses in the wilderness with the bronze snake being lifted up, so would he, Jesus, be lifted up – and we now know that he was talking about being lifted up on a cross.

You may think to yourselves that the idea of the snake on a pole is all a bit of nonsense and unusual. But I wonder if you have ever seen either of these images before?

Both of them come from ancient Greek mythology, snakes on a pole which were a symbol of healing. These are both images which are common today, because they are signs which are used by Doctors, men and women of healing. You may see them at hospitals or on a doctor's car. So that image of a snake on a pole and healing which we hear of in Moses, was not unusual then. It was in other cultures as well.

The difference now is, of course, that if we looked at a snake on a pole we would not be healed. If we are sick, we are better off going to a doctor.

But when we look at Jesus on the cross, we do find a new type of healing. A healing of the broken relationship between God and Man. A healing of sin and division. We find love.

The Cross is such a sign of healing, that it is used by many in the medical world.

The Red Cross itself, of which we have a group here at St Paul's, is an organisation whose mission is to : protect human life ... and to ... care for the health of the vulnerable.

Originally a sign of death, of punishment and torture, Jesus has transformed the cross into a sign of new life, joy and hope.

Not only something which we can see in art, in films, in books and stories where there are Christ-like figures following Christ, but it is also something we can see pre-figured in the Old Testament.

It is truly a Triumph.