

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“Jesus said to Nicodemus: ‘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.’”

John3: 14

About fifteen years ago I made an adjustment in the way I celebrated the Eucharist. I read an account of an old infirm Jesuit priest in the Chicago Province who had trained for the missions in India back in the late 1940's, went there, got sick, and had to return to the United States for recuperation. Every year he petitioned to return to India. Every year his Provincial declined to send him because his health was so frail. Finally, after a quarter century of such requests, the Jesuit was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He then petitioned that he knew how his life was probably going to end and still he asked to be assigned to India if only to die there. This request was granted. He went and he lived there for some time and then died there.

This priest was celebrating Mass shortly before he was to leave. There were some visitors there who experienced his celebration of the Eucharist and remarked that the elevation of the host and the chalice was very prolonged. As they moved past being uncomfortable at the length of the silent elevation they began to notice that there was something going on between the priest and his Lord in that moment. Something very real. Something very prayerful. Something they had not experienced before. They spoke to the priest afterwards.

He replied easily that over the years in the moment of consecration he had become more and more aware of just Who it was he held in his hands. And he began to sense that he was to “hold high his Lord” for all to see. And so he did. The little prayerful conversation with the Lord he added over time. I knew as I read that story that that is precisely what the Lord desired of me. To hold him high at that precise moment of the Eucharist like the Son of Man was lifted high on the cross for the salvation of the world. And so I set out on a new way to celebrate Eucharist. This priest was my inspiration; this passage was my confirmation. I write this because on occasion people ask me or ask others about me and why I extend the elevation for as long as I do. Did you know the background? That is the question of the week.