At the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the Roman Empire ***used*** crucifixion not because it was an efficient means of execution but because it was a public display of power and authority meant to terrify would-be disturbers of the peace. Death on a cross was ***slow***: most victims weren't tortured beforehand as Jesus was, but simply left to hang. When their leg muscles finally gave way they could no longer push up to breathe and would slowly suffocate.

From the very beginning though, Christians weren't afraid to take symbols and even celebrations from surrounding cultures and give them a new, Gospel-filled meaning. The cross — once a brutal instrument of fear — became the Church's central sign of hope and salvation.

One of the best explanations I've ever heard of the meaning of the cross is this: before Jesus died for us there was a great divide between earth and heaven, like an impassable river, with no bridge to cross from one side to the other. When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, that same cross ***became*** the bridge between earth and heaven — not only offering the ***possibility*** of passage at the end of this life but opening the ***possibility***, here and now, of divine intimacy ***with*** him.

Pope Francis spoke of this reality in a 2022 document: "In the Eucharist and in all Sacraments, we are guaranteed the ***possibility*** of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the power of his Paschal Mystery reach us." The Paschal Mystery — or the Easter Mystery, to use a more familiar word — is precisely what the cross proclaims to anyone willing to listen: Jesus laid down his life for you and me because he loves us, and he rose from the dead to be ***with*** us — not only in sacramental form but also by the power of his Holy

Spirit. This is what Pope Francis means by “the ***possibility*** of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the ***power*** of the Paschal Mystery reach us.” It’s also exactly what Paul announces in today’s second reading – and I paraphrase:

God became human so that we could know God in a truly human way. God took the name Jesus — the only name that contains the Divine presence it signifies — and built the bridge that spans the gap between heaven and earth. And we’re offered the ***possibility*** of crossing that bridge not just when we die but ***now*** - in the human experience of ***eternal life*** through the sacraments and through the intimacy of prayer. As John 3:16 proclaims: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.”

It all centres on Jesus and on ***what*** his crucifixion and resurrection — the Pascal mystery, symbolised by the cross — have achieved for us. To pray his name “Jesus” is to invoke him, to welcome him, to allow ***him*** to live within ***us***. We often call him by titles such as Christ, Lord, or Son — and these titles matter — but the personal name “Jesus” uniquely embodies his saving presence.

So as we look to and exalt the cross today, let’s remember that it’s not just a sign of suffering, but the bridge of love built for us. And as we speak the name of Jesus, let’s do so as an act of faith — inviting ***Him*** into our hearts, our community, our parish, and our world, because the more we call on his holy name with desire & love, the more the power of his cross and resurrection can transform us, right here and right now. We pray this, Lord Jesus, in your most holy name, for you live and reign with the Father and Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.