A deep, accessible, and timely reflection on one of the most powerful prefigurations of Redemption

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Introduction

There are images in the Bible that seem, at first glance, strange—even unsettling. One of them is the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. How is it possible that a serpent—symbol of sin, deception, even of Satan himself—could be used by God as a means of salvation? What relationship does this have with Christ? And, even more importantly, what does this story tell us about our lives today, in the midst of a world that is wounded, sick, divided, and often without hope?

This article seeks to explore this mystery with depth, but also with simplicity. We invite you to look with new eyes at the story of the bronze serpent and discover in it a powerful symbol of the Cross of Christ, a spiritual guide for our inner healing, and a lesson that is very much alive for these times that are so in need of redemption.

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1. **The story in the desert: Moses and the bronze serpent**

In the book of Numbers, chapter 21, we find this striking account:

> *"Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."*

> *(Numbers 21:6-9)*

This scene, so rich in symbolism, is more than just a historical episode. It is a prophetic revelation of the power of faith, repentance, and—most profoundly—the mystery of the Cross.

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2. **The prefiguration of Christ in the bronze serpent**

Jesus Himself interprets this scene in an intimate conversation with Nicodemus:

> *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life."*
> *(John 3:14-15)*

Here lies the interpretative key. The bronze serpent is not an act of idolatry, nor a contradiction, but a prophetic figure: **a sign pointing to the crucified Christ**. Just as the Israelites were dying from venomous bites, we also die spiritually because of sin. As they were saved by looking in faith at the serpent lifted up, so we are healed by gazing in faith upon the Crucified One.

The paradox of the symbol is what makes it so powerful. God transforms what is a sign of death—the serpent—into an instrument of life. In the same way, He transforms the Cross—an instrument of torture and execution—into a sign of redemption.

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3. **Theology of healing: The Cross as medicine**

The Patristic tradition did not overlook this parallel. St. Irenaeus, St. Augustine, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and other Church Fathers saw in the bronze serpent an image of the mystery of *salus per crucem*, salvation through the Cross. Christ, though sinless, became "like sin," taking our wounds upon Himself.

> *"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*
> *(2 Corinthians 5:21)*

The Cross is medicine because it takes in the poison of the world in order to destroy it from within. Where sin seemed to triumph, Love conquers.

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4. **The drama of modern man: a new wilderness**

Today, many walk through life like the Israelites in the desert: weary, impatient, full of complaints, bitten by the venom of relativism, individualism, resentment, and indifference. The soul of the modern world suffers from spiritual bites: broken families, addictions, emotional wounds, depression, hopelessness.

And here, the cry of the people echoes strongly: "Pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us!" (Num 21:7). The human heart cries out—even if it doesn't say it aloud—that it needs salvation. The good news is that the Cross is there, lifted high, just like on Calvary, ready to be looked at in faith.

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5. **What does it mean to "look at the Cross" today?**

It is not just about having crucifixes at home or around one's neck (although those are important), but about **contemplating with the heart**, with faith, with love, what took place there. To look at the Cross is:

- To recognize that sin is real and has consequences.
- To accept that only Christ can heal our wounds.
- To trust that, even if we are wounded, there is hope.
- To decide to live a new way, inspired by crucified love.

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6. **Practical applications: A theological and pastoral guide**

A) **For those struggling with sin**

- **Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation**: This is to look at the Cross with humility. It is to allow the Blood of Christ to cleanse you.
- **Meditate daily on the Crucifix**: Spend five minutes in front of one. Look at it. Speak to Him. Listen. Cry if you need to.

B) **For those suffering emotional or spiritual wounds**

- **The Cross is not punishment, but a place of comfort**. Unite your pain with Christ's. Don't flee from suffering—transform it into prayer.
- **Seek spiritual accompaniment**: A good priest or spiritual guide can help you look at the Cross with hope and not fear.

C) **For those involved in pastoral ministry or evangelization**

- Teach others to see the Cross not as defeat, but as a **source of life**.
- Integrate into catechesis the connection between the Old and New Testaments, showing that **Christ was foretold from the beginning**.

D) **For the modern world**

- The world needs witnesses who have been healed by Christ. **Be one of them**. Don't hide your healed wounds: show them as proof that the Cross has power!

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7. **A spirituality of the Cross: living in healing**

Looking once is not enough. Like the Israelites, we must look again and again. And every time we turn our gaze to the crucified Christ, something inside of us heals, something is set right, something is illuminated.

There is no Christian spirituality without the Cross. But it is a glorious Cross, not a bitter one—a Cross that gives meaning to suffering, opens heaven, and lights the way with hope.

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8. **Conclusion: “They shall look on Him whom they have pierced”**

The bronze serpent was not magic. Neither is the Cross. But **faith that contemplates it does transform**. Today, more than ever, we need to gaze anew upon the Crucified One, understand that everything was given to us there, and live from that certainty.

> *“They shall look on Him whom they have pierced.”*
> *(Zechariah 12:10; quoted in John 19:37)*

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9. **Final Prayer**

> *Lord Jesus, lifted up on the Cross out of love,*
> *You who healed so many in life,*
> *and from the Cross heal even more,*
> *look upon me with Your merciful eyes.*
> *May I never turn away from You,*
> *and as I look at You each day,*
> *may my heart be purified,*
> *my wounds healed,*
> *and my life transformed.*

> *Amen.*

If this article has inspired you, don’t keep it to yourself. The Cross is medicine, and the world is sick. **Share the healing.** Live as one who has been touched by the power of crucified Love.