

## **Vera Crux Preceptory No 654 Banner Dedication**

An Oration given by  
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Provincial Prelate

on the occasion of the Dedication of the Preceptory Banner  
on Tuesday 14th February 2012

This is a most important day in the life of this distinguished Preceptory, the dedication of your Preceptory Banner.

Flags or Banners have a long and distinguished history going back into the mists of time. The Bible itself has numerous references to banners and they have been especially used throughout history as rallying points for armies.

The Psalmist says:

"We will rejoice in thy salvation and in the name of our God we will set up our banners.  
[Ps.20:5]

and again,

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth ." (Ps 60:4]

In our Royal Arch Chapters we find banners are an important part of the furnishings of a chapter, signifying the twelve tribes of Israel and how they rallied the tribes and provided a focal point for those selected to guard the Ark of the Covenant and the design for these banners is described in the Book of Genesis.

The British Army in particular emphasises this reverence to banners in the various Regimental Banners or Colours of the Regimental Flags which provided a rallying point for the troops so that in the heat of battle they knew where their commander was stationed and could rally to his cause.

The annual parade of the Trooping of the Colour is a reminder of what all regiments did at one time which was to shew the banner or colour to the troops so that they would recognise it in the heat and melee of battle. These Banners or Colours were blessed and set aside for special reverence and carefully protected and certain banners displayed Battle honours shewing how valiantly the Regiment had behaved in battle and it was a matter of disgrace if the banner was lost in battle, as they were revered as symbolising the spirit of the Regiment and so honoured are they that when no longer used by a regiment they are laid up in Cathedrals and Regimental Churches emphasising their special association to their particular regiment.

The Order of Knights Templar also used a number of banners to distinguish themselves. They had the Beauceant, the Battle Banner of the order bearing the colours of the order, black over white which they always carried into battle and there is the Vexillum Belli, the War Banner of the Order, a red cross on a white background which was unfurled at the headquarters of the Grand Master during time of war. The unfurling

of these banners struck fear into the hearts of the enemy especially when they saw them streaming in the wind as the knights rode into battle bearing these devices. Our Order today also uses these two banners in our ceremonies and these are proudly displayed in our Preceptories. But in addition to these two we have further banners to distinguish important officials within the order, the Grand Master and the Provincial Prior. These are used to denote their presence and like the banners of old to provide a rallying point for the knights.

But in addition Preceptories have adopted a banner peculiar to their own Preceptory to embody the spirit of the Preceptory and to provide a rallying point for the members -of the Preceptory and today the knights of this Preceptory have had such a banner made and, like a Regimental Colour, it will be special to each member of the Preceptory and will, I am sure, instil a feeling of pride when they see it raised on the nights when they meet and also when it is paraded with the other banners at Provincial Preceptory.

The name of your Preceptory, Vera Crux, is a very special one and harks back to the Holy Land itself and indeed the very foundation of our faith, for Our Saviour was crucified on a similar cross outside the Holy City, Jerusalem at Golgotha. The cross was a Roman instrument of execution and this eventually became, following Our Lord's crucifixion and death, a symbol of our Salvation.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple by the Romans in August of AD 70, Jerusalem was re-built later by the Romans as a Pagan city. Over the site of the crucifixion was built a Pagan Temple and another Pagan Temple was erected on the Temple Mount itself, but in a curious way this preserved the sacred sites from being built upon by secular buildings.

The Star Jewel of our Order for a knight, has as its central feature a simple Calvary Cross and surrounding it an inscription which reads, "In hoc signo vinces" meaning, "In this sign conquer." This was the sign used by the Emperor, Constantine the Great on his great War Banner and was the eventual instrument of his conversion to Christianity. Following his conversion, the Emperor Constantine decided to alter the cityscape of Jerusalem and sent a letter to the Bishop of Jerusalem giving him instructions as to what he intended to do, to find the sites sacred to Christians and build churches to the Glory of God. Constantine's mother, St. Helena, went to Jerusalem at this time on pilgrimage and to their delight when the Pagan Temple covering the traditional site of the crucifixion had been demolished they discovered not only the site of the crucifixion and the cross on which the Lord had been crucified, but also the tomb which had held the body of the Lord and so the Emperor Constantine ordered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to be erected over the site, encompassing both the tomb and the place of crucifixion, Golgotha itself.

The name Vera Crux means, as you know, 'True Cross' and the Church to commemorate the finding of the precious relic ordered a Feast Day, called The Exaltation of the Holy Cross or simply Holy Cross Day to be held on 14th September in the Universal Church. It was considered a great honour to obtain even a sliver of this

precious relic and many Abbeys and Cathedrals, as well as kings, acquired even such a small piece and these are and were treasured for centuries. The Knights Templar themselves were documented as having a piece of the True Cross which they carried into battle with them and it was carried with them when they confronted the Saracens at the fateful Battle of the Horns of Hattin. It was there that the Templars suffered their greatest defeat and the relic of the True Cross was captured by the Saracens and only later ransomed back to the Order following the surrender of the City of Acre to the Knights Templar in 1191.

So much for some of the history of the Order and the name of your Preceptory, now for the banner itself and the illustration displayed upon it and its symbolism.

The central feature, of course is the cross itself, representing the Vera Crux, the Cross of Calvary set in a landscape indicative of Golgotha where Our Lord was crucified and overlooking the Judean Hills as Golgotha itself was outside the Old City Walls on the edge of the Judean wilderness. The Cross is empty suggestive of the Risen Christ and emphasising his victory over death. As St. Paul reminds us quoting the Prophet Isaiah, *"Death is swallowed up in victory, 1J[1Cor.15:54]* The victory of course is the victory of Our Lord in rising again on the third day, shewing that death was defeated and no longer to be feared. This gave great heart to the early Knights Templar as they fought to regain the Holy Land and the Holy Places in Jerusalem for Christendom.

Below the Cross in a compartment are two scallop shells, these simple objects were worn by pilgrims, sometimes on their hats and sometimes on their clothes to shew that they had embarked on and completed a pilgrimage to a holy place. Pilgrims undertook this religious duty in a spirit of humility, as such the scallop shells could also be used as spoon, cup and dish as the pilgrim took a little with him in the way of luxuries. In our ceremony of admission as a Knight Templar the postulant knight is enjoined to make a figurative seven year pilgrimage as a sign of devotion and humility. As Warrior-Monks humility was of course one of the hall-marks of the early Knights Templar and to emphasise this aspect of their Order they called themselves "The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon" taking as their seal two knights on a single horse to emphasise the Order's original poverty.

This Preceptory, Vera Crux, follows in a great and noble line and the name of your Preceptory, Vera Crux will shine whenever the banner of your Preceptory is raised and displayed. The Vera Crux was a treasure, greatly honoured by our early brother knights, may the banner bearing this great and honoured name be for you a rallying point and a matter of great pride for the knights of this Preceptory and be revered as symbolising the spirit of this Preceptory for generations to come.