

13th Sunday  
6/28/2020

## EMBRACING THE CROSS

One of the most moving parts of Holy Week is the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday. People are invited to come forward to reverence the Cross, perhaps with a bow, a touch or even a kiss. —As we do that symbolically, we also are to be embracing the cross in our own lives and uniting it to the cross of Christ, to his suffering death and resurrection. It is touching to watch people come forward when you know part of their story: to watch someone who is widowed or who has lost a child; someone struggling with addiction or with cancer; or others in one way or another who are bearing their own cross and uniting it to Jesus. When I watch little children approach the Cross I think there may not be much of the Cross in their lives right but there will be.

Viktor Frankel was the survivor of four concentration camps in World War II. He noticed that those who survived were not necessarily the strongest but rather those who could find meaning in what they were experiencing. The Cross gives meaning to our sufferings. It doesn't make them pleasant but it does give them meaning and makes them a little easier to bear. Now if we are sick, we still try to get well but in the meantime we unite our sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus. St. Benedict said, *We patiently share in the passion of Christ so we may eventually enter into the Kingdom of God.*

Jesus calls us to take up our cross and to follow him. There is a little prayer booklet I had growing up that has two interesting pictures. The first one shows Jesus carrying the Cross, and behind him the Pope carrying a cross, then clergy and religious carrying crosses and then members of the laity including children carrying crosses. All of them carrying crosses and all following Jesus. Not surprisingly, some have fallen along the way, but together they follow Jesus and while each carries his or her own cross alone; they carry their crosses together.

One lesson from that image is that we all have a cross or many different crosses to bear. Although we have to carry it ourselves, we don't do so alone. Even in bearing crosses we follow Jesus together and help each other. We journey to God

together. Alone the cross can be too heavy to bear. With that picture it says: *Today's living Way of the Cross exchanged for Palm of eternal peace.*

And that leads to the second picture in that little prayer manual. It again shows Jesus but now triumphant and all those who were bearing crosses now hold palm branches of victory. But it is the children who are approaching Jesus first and the Pope who is coming last. Again, there is a message in that: the suffering of the Cross leads to the palm of victory and unity with Christ. And again, people are journeying to God together.

For the past three and a half months, we have borne a heavy cross of the COVID pandemic. It is a cross we carry with the rest of the world. We have to bear this cross individually but at the same time we do so together as members of the Body of Christ, even if we do so because we have no other choice. And we're not done bearing this cross by any means. An additional cross in all this is that we don't know how long it will last and we don't have a template for dealing with it. And on top of all of this, we have seen civil strife and have been reminded of the heavy and ugly cross of racism and that so many people have had to bear for so long and continue to bear; a cross no one should have to carry.

In the baptism rite, at the beginning, infants are marked by the sign of the cross on the forehead by the priest or deacon, parents and godparents and with a family after someone has died the prayers give the option of those present marking the forehead of the deceased with the sign of the cross. In life and death we are marked by the Cross of Christ.

In the second reading, St. Paul reminds the Romans that when we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into his death so that we might share in his resurrection; in other words in his movement from life through death into new life, in what we call the Paschal Mystery. In baptism we share in Jesus' dying and rising. Sacramentally we share in that reality, even though we don't die and rise. It is as if Jesus is carrying us across a stream on his shoulders. We get to the other side with him but we don't get wet. But baptism isn't just a gift, it is a call, it is a responsibility. St. Paul says, *You too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.*

Baptism is something we receive once but it is a gift, a mystery and a call that we continue to live throughout our lives and it calls us to daily conversion—to be dead

to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus. Strange thing about sin, it can resurrect. We can think we have died to it and it can come back at us again. Hence the need for the Sacrament of Reconciliation which among other things is a sacrament of ongoing conversion. Dealing with our own fallen humanity is a cross we must also bear. To grow in holiness does not mean overcoming our humanity but perfecting it. Conversion can be an event but also a process.

Here in the Eucharist we come together to meet Christ as we gather in his name, as people minister in his name, as we listen to his word and as he gifts himself to us under the form of bread and wine. Here by our presence and hopefully by our encouragement, we strengthen one another. Here with lives of intentional faith we seek to carry our cross and journey to God together and help one other in carrying our crosses. What we do symbolically once a year on Good Friday may we do every day as we strive to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. As the figures in that picture, we all carry our own cross following Jesus with each other. As we share with Jesus in carrying the cross together, so may we rejoice together carrying the palm of eternal peace. May we rejoice with the Psalm we heard saying, *Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.*