

Easter: The Power of the Cross Is Given to Us.



On Good Friday hundred of people at St. Ignatius and millions of people throughout the world gathered to venerate the Cross of the Lord. As I was watching the people here coming forward, I was keenly aware of the problems that many of them faced. This lady was sick, that man just buried his son, this child barely survived a deep problem. Many were dealing with job loss, or the fear of losing their homes. It occurred to me that every person who came up had concerns. And still they processed up the aisle to venerate the cross. Every person trusted in the Lord to guide her or his life. All of us, devoted to Jesus Christ, are drawn to the Cross of the Lord. All of us are overwhelmed by the Power of the Cross. For when we give all our difficulties to the Lord, the Lord finds ways for us to grow in love and grow closer to Him. And then our difficulties become occasions for putting our Christianity into action.

And yet, the cross is a paradox. How could something which rendered its victim completely powerless be an instrument of power? But it was an instrument of power for Christ. And it is an instrument of power for us. Christ's power was seen in His absolute submission to the Father's will, in His absolute weakness. Human beings tortured Him and murdered Him. But their efforts to destroy Him only resulted in His Life transforming the world. It is true that in the eyes of these humans, if Christ had power He should have come down from the cross and destroyed his enemies, but God called Him to conquer a bigger game, a stronger enemy than mere human power. The world was in the grips of another power, the power of death, the power of evil. The Father saw how His special creation, the

beings who could think and choose and love, were suffering. He saw the power that evil had over the world. He sent His Son to destroy the power of evil, to destroy the devil's hold on the world. By dying, by embracing what humans saw as weakness, Jesus unleashed the greatest power the world has ever seen, the power of Sacrificial Love, the Power of the Cross. For, as St. Paul says in the First Chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians, "The weakness of God is stronger than human strength."

It is the same for us. For the Christian our strength is witnessed in our very weakness. A little boy dying of leukemia, Raymond Jobin, said to me in a rasping voice, "Let's pray today for anyone in this hospital who is in as much pain as I am in." A dying Teen, Jamie Kelleher, told me, "I have lost everything, but no one can take Christ from me." This is strength in weakness. This is the Power of the Cross.

We need to remember this when we are bombarded with the difficulties of life. Even if these weren't difficult economic times, the media would still find some tragedy anywhere from our neighborhood to a remote corner of the world and ram it down our throats with non-stop coverage. It is very tempting for us to join the pharisees and Temple leaders and call out, "If you are the son of God come down off that cross."

But we don't join the unbelievers. We know that Jesus is saving us. He is saving us through His Love. "See, I make all things new," we read in Revelations 21. The scar of evil is death, but now for believers death is only physical. Life continues with Christ and in Christ. Horrible situations in the world exist just as they did in the times before the Lord, but now for believers even the worst suffering becomes a prayer, a union with Christ. So a St. Maximilian Kolbe can sit in the starvation cell in Auschwitz in pain, waiting to die, but at peace. And a St. Gianni Beretta Mola can offer her life for her unborn child knowing that she was created to live, to give life, to die for the Lord, and to live for the Lord. And a St. Theresa of the Child Jesus can live in pain in the convent of Lisieux seeing in her suffering an opportunity to join Christ on the cross emptying herself for others. We may feel very much removed from the saints in our spiritual lives, but the fact is that all of us are candidates for canonization. We all know that we are better with the Lord than when we push Him aside. All of us also know that we can be even better than our fondest imagination. That is the Power of the Cross.

Yes, there are times that we are like the people to whom the Letter to the Hebrews was addressed. These people were third or fourth generation Christians. They had been taught the faith, but now were being challenged by the evil forces wishing to destroy the faith. They were afraid that they were going to be put to death like Peter and the disciples who had already been killed, or like Paul, Justin, and the early leaders of the Christian Church. Those who didn't fear death, certainly feared economic repercussions. No one would have any dealing with them except other Christians. Soon, they would not be able to earn a living. They were in full "woe is me" mode when they received this Letter from

God, the Letter to the Hebrews. “Lift up your drooping hands and shore up your knocking knees,” they are told in Hebrews 12. There is infinitely more to life than the here and now. They needed to stand straight and remain committed to Jesus Christ.

And when our spiritual arms start drooping and our spiritual knees start to knock, we need to stand firm for the Lord. When we hurt too badly to pray, then we need to make our hurt our prayer. When we are afraid of being excluded from

our peers because we live by the moral code of sacrificial love, then we need to love them better with the Love of the Lord. We Christians, we Catholics, are not just insignificant entities among God’s creation. For, as Hebrews says, we have been called to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. Abel’s blood called out to God for vengeance against Cain. Jesus’ blood calls out for mercy for His people. This world is imperfect. Our lives are imperfect. But the Perfect is waiting for us. There is so much more waiting for us. There is so much more than the senses can reveal. “Life is worth living,” to quote the great Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, Life is worth living when it is lived for Christ.

The flowers, the candles, the music, and all the Easter appointments are symbols of the Life worth Living. They are symbols that the world has been transformed by the Power of the Cross. There is hope in the world. That Hope is Jesus Christ.

Rich or poor, hurting or healthy, no matter what our present situation may be, we need to keep our focus solidly on the Lord. We have to stop defining ourselves by what we have or by what we do. We need to be defined by whom we are. We are Christian. And what does that mean? That means that we are consumed by God. The Hebrews are reminded, “Our God is a consuming fire.” He engages every aspect of our existence. We cannot allow ourselves to become disjointed. We cannot allow ourselves to be hypocrites, Christians here and pagans there. Everything about our lives belongs to the Lord. Every attitude of our lives must reflect His Love and His Presence. We must be completely engulfed by the Love of the Lord. Everything that matters in life reflects His Love. All that is worthwhile comes from Him and returns to Him.

We need God. Life is chaos without him. But with God there are no limits to our ability to love. This is our Christian dignity! We are followers of Christ and sharers of His resurrected life through our personal acceptance of this life, our baptism. We possess Jesus Christ. We have the source of life that

can never be taken from us.

The Power of the Cross has transformed the world, beginning with us and then reaching through us to all who are seeking meaning in life. Others need to experience our joy, our hope, our faith, our Lord.

"Alleluia!" we proclaim today as Church. "Alleluia, praise the Lord. Jesus is alive. He is our Savior. He is our Redeemer. And He is ours. And whatever life throws at us, well, that we give to Him.

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