

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Sep 16th 2018

Years ago, when I professed my vows to live as a Sister of St. Francis, I added a tag line and said: "...and the power of the Cross will sustain me." Did I know or realize what I was saying? At the least, I trusted in the words as they were more than words, but a strong belief in an ever-present crucified Christ who had been, and still IS, resolutely faithful in our relationship.

Jesus tells us *to deny oneself, take up our cross and follow him*. In other words, I can't let anyone or thing stand in the way of my relationship with him. He sternly scolds Peter, his friend and disciple, "get behind me Satan". What are the obstacles in life that interfere with my or our path to Jesus, to greater freedom and to ultimately becoming who we are meant to be. "*Who do people say that I am?*" Jesus in his own path to LIFE, touches base in a discerning way to seek information that will keep him faithfully on task. Saint Ignatius put it simply in his writing of the *Spiritual Exercises*, *First Principle and Foundation: Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want, and I choose what better leads to God's deepening his life in me.* (David Fleming, SJ translation)

The power of the cross? It is LIFE, LOVE, SURRENDER and an EMBRACE. It is a road map.



I share these two images with you. One is the replica of the San Damiano Cross through which Jesus spoke to St. Francis of Assisi saying "rebuild My church". It is an image of a living Jesus, with eyes wide open and arms outstretched ready to embrace the world. "Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it." GOOD WORKS.



The other image is a picture I took while on retreat this year of the corpus of Jesus in the chapel. It is an enhanced photo which gave me the illusion of the moment Jesus gives up his spirit. He surrenders, and pulls away from the cross, the instrument of death that leads to LIFE. The moment of resurrection--FAITH.

In reflecting on the Cross, I can only do this in the light of the resurrection and the living God.

While on retreat, I spent much time with Mary at the foot of the cross praying for parents who have lost a child. Mary's own surrender to God became a portal for the GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL that would comfort those who mourn for centuries to come. *"For he has freed my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling... I shall walk before the Lord, in the land of the living."*—Psalm 116 Heidi Russel in her recent address on the Trinity at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious National Assembly stated, *"When our love is more fierce than our grief, death leads to resurrection."*

Today I will gather with the Christian Community around the table of Love. We celebrate the Eucharist with gratitude. As sign, symbol and presence of the living God who surrendered life in Jesus, who gave us the gift and knowledge of new life in his resurrection, we will receive the body and blood of Jesus in Communion. Here is unity and nourishment to pick up our crosses. We will go forth to "love and serve one another." Faith and Good Works!

The Cross is a reality that has been part of our lives in many ways. I have no doubt as anyone who reflects on scripture today will identify this reality. My hope is that the resurrection is also a reality. For me, the symbol of the Cross has been before me throughout my life. My parents were married on the Feast of the Exultation of the Cross, 9/14. I lived in community with my Franciscan Sisters at St. Mary of Sorrows Parish whose feast is 9/15. As a Franciscan, the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis is 9/17 as Francis himself desired to be in union with the crucified Christ. Living among and with people of developing nations, people on the margins in our own country, as well as meeting the pain in lives of those I have met in other ministries has put flesh and blood to the suffering Christ. While the images and symbols are strong, the lived

reality is both grace and gift. It has been an experience of both faith and good works. There has been death and life. It is what picking up one's cross and following Jesus has been about and I will always believe that "*the power of the Cross will sustain me.*"

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