

Celebration of the Lord's Passion
Good Friday
April 22, 2011

Today we come face to face with the primary Christian symbol, and that symbol is... a cross.

We begin with five facts. First, God died. On that drab afternoon 2,000 years ago, your God and mine died. Second fact: Jesus really suffered. Don't fictionize Calvary. The crown on his head was real thorns; it was warm spit that splattered his face; sharp nails pierced his hands and feet. Third fact: Jesus suffered and died for us. It is St. Paul's unbelieving whisper: "The Son of God... gave Himself *for me*." He died for me, as if Christ and his cross had arms only for me. Fourth fact: Jesus died for me because he loved me. He did not have to die. "No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own free will." St. Paul has no doubt about the reason why: "the Son of God... loved me." Fifth fact: By his death Jesus gave me life. Without his death I would be dead. I mean, I would be without faith, without hope, without love. Yes, without joy.

But what do these facts say to us? God died... a painful death... for me... out of love... to give me life. Therefore what? Therefore the cross! Not outside Jerusalem. Here and now. The words of Jesus are raw, rough, uncompromising. If you want to follow him, if you would be his disciple, you take up your cross daily. If you want to save your life, you must lose it... for Christ's sake.

The cross of Christ has to be touched to me personally, individually. It is touched to me in several ways: through the death that is baptism. Through the Eucharist that recaptures the death of Christ until he comes again. But in a special way through my own cross, without which I cannot be his disciple. Like the life of Christ, my own life has to be an ongoing dying-rising. Christian living is an ongoing movement to life through death – everyday death.

What does it mean? What is this cross you must take up daily? It's easy enough to find the cross everywhere across the world. It isn't hard to discover the cross in downtown Seattle. But where is *your* sharing in the passion of Christ?

I'm afraid I cannot tell you. You are, each of you, a unique authority on your own Calvary. I dare not lay a cross on you. I can only provoke you into meditating. What do you usually avoid? And whom? Are you interested only in comfort? What keeps you from being a saint – from being like St. Paul, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Jesus? Who matters most in your life? If you had to confess what you want out of human living, would it have anything to do with a crucified Christ? How do you handle illness? What are you afraid of? Death? Life? In whom do you see Christ? To whom do you give bread and drink? To the hungry and thirsty? When did you last welcome a stranger or give clothes to the naked? Who are the sick you visit? What prisons, of body or mind, have seen your face?

On this Good Friday, at this point in your existence, whom are you like? Mary? John? Pilate? Herod? Joseph of Arimathea? Peter? The disciples looking on from a safe distance? The Church will survive scandal and sin. What imperils Christianity is our lukewarmness. God dies on a cross for us and business goes on as usual.

I am not asking for wailing and weeping. I am asking you to live your Christian commitment, to live day after day the dying-rising that Holy Week celebrates. The liturgy expresses ritually what goes on the rest of our lives. The liturgical journey ritualizes the human journey. But does it? Where, my friends, where is *your* Good Friday?

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