

A.M.D.G.

Homily, Palm Sunday, 2025

“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

I must confess to you today, brothers and sisters, that I struggle greatly to accept the cross of Jesus Christ. I question why the cross is the way of Jesus. Catholic Christianity is the only religion in the world that celebrates the death of its Savior. Islam celebrates Muhammed’s ascent into heaven. Buddhists imitate the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment. Even Protestants do not celebrate Jesus’ death the way that we Catholics do. In fact, the Catholic tradition has made the cross the central religious symbol of our Faith. We see Jesus on the cross every day in every Church, in every house, we begin every prayer with it. Yet, we have become so familiar with the image that we are in danger of losing a sense of the terrible mystery of the cross. I must admit to you that I do not like looking at the cross. What I see is the, *“man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity,”* but what I feel is aversion because my life has been rather different. I have been a man of comfort, accustomed to pleasures. Do I want to follow in the footsteps of a crucified savior?

The cross of Jesus represents the opposite of everything that we humans normally take to be good and to be promoted. Think of it for a moment. We praise personal freedom, yet Jesus is bound and led away as a captive. We promote justice in society, yet Jesus is unjustly condemned to death. We seek our own comfort and avoid suffering, yet Jesus is cruelly tortured, scourged and crucified. We seek the honor and esteem of others, yet Jesus is rejected, *“one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem.”*

So when I stand before the hideous suffering of the cross I flinch and draw away. It is a reality foreign to my world, and my being revolts against it. Yet, it is in this revulsion before the cross that I question my whole life and the reality of my world. ‘Am I missing something? Are things not as I see them to be? Is God something different from what I supposed? Following St. Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians, in the folly of the cross I search for the wisdom of God. What is this wisdom?

Where can I find it?

There is so much to ponder. The mystery of the cross is inexhaustible. I offer you two points of the cross to consider. First, we know that Jesus could have escaped at any time. The divine power and majesty, which could have saved Jesus, hides behind the human nature. The letter to the Philippians states that Jesus became *obedient unto death, even death on a cross*. Jesus chose to suffer and die. This is so important in our time, where cut throat politics and the will to power seem to dominate all human interactions.

What does this mean? God chose to respond to human evil not with power, but with love. Jesus loved His Father so much that he was willing to *become obedient unto death*. Jesus loved us so much that he *laid down his life* for us., his sheep Love that is willing to sacrifice everything for the beloved is the fullness of love, Jesus teaches us this by his actions.

And see how it works against evil. Evil begets evil. Violence causes more violence. Look at the war in Gaza. Jesus defeats violent power with love. And notice this point: the more violent they are to Him, the more love He reveals. The more evil Jesus endures, the greater the good He manifests. He wins by losing. He loves by suffering. As Pope Benedict put it, *“the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him.”*

The second point: Jesus’ love is so striking, His sacrifice so great, that it even softens my heart before the cross. Would my heart be softened with mere words? Would my will be moved with simple promises, even for great things? No, I do not think so. Jesus’ suffering love moves me to respond with love.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, a feminist intellectual at Emory University, went through a conversion and became Catholic, describes the moment when she understood the meaning of the cross of Jesus: *“A decisive moment in my journey in faith came when, one day, seemingly out of nowhere, the thought pierced me that Jesus had died for my sins. And, immediately on its heels, came the devastating recognition that I am not worth his sacrifice. Only gradually have I come truly to understand that the determination of worth belongs not to me but to him. God’s love for us forever exceeds our control and challenges our understanding. Like faith, it is His gift, and our task is to do our best to receive it.”*

This Holy Week I offer you one point for meditation, from the *Spiritual Exercises*: “to consider how He suffers all this for my sins, etc.; and what I ought to do and suffer for Him.” SpEx. 197

- Tom Holland Sinjar visit, after it was recaptured from the Islamic State by the Kurds, in northern Iraq. The Islamic State desecrated the Churches in Sinjar. They smashed the altars, the baptismal fonts. The soldiers tore down the crucifix and burned it. They took Christians out and crucified them.
 - o “The reality of this opened up an abyss before me.” Tom Holland. “The utter, utter strangeness of perhaps can seem too familiar to people who have grown up in a Christian society. The weirdness of the fact that the great symbol of Christianity, the great marker of its identity, should be an instrument of torture.”
- The first Christians very much wrestled with the scandal of the cross of Jesus Christ. Their leader, their Messiah, their king, their God, was crucified by the Romans. It was very hard for them to come to grips with this reality.
- St. Paul speaks of this explicitly, *“For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* 1Cor. 1:22-25
- And yet, St. Paul and the early Church do not downplay the crucifixion. They do not brush over it without mention. Malcolm Muggeridge, an English journalist and author...
- It is in the cross of Jesus Christ that we come to the heart of the Gospel message.
- POINT 1: We need to sit with the shockingness of the Cross.
 - o Dostoyevsky, Holbein painting of Jesus’ dead body laying in the tomb.
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- POINT 2: What does the cross of Christ reveal? Power is made perfect in weakness (2Cor. 12) Pope Benedict XVI, Power in weakness.
 - o *“In the Ancient Near East, it was customary for kings to style themselves shepherds of their people. This was an image of their power, a cynical image: to them their subjects were like sheep, which the shepherd could dispose of as he wished. When the shepherd of all humanity, the living God, himself became a lamb, he stood on the side of the lambs, with those who are downtrodden and killed. This is how he reveals himself to be the true shepherd: “I am the Good Shepherd . . . I lay down my life for the sheep”, Jesus says of himself (Jn 10:14f). It is not power, but love that redeems us! This is God’s sign: he himself is love. How often we wish that God would make show himself stronger, that he would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way, they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God’s patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.”*