

Holy Cross Sunday
September 13, 2015
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Bearing the Name of The Holy Cross

Shine in our hearts Lord Jesus and help us to walk in your way.

Today we celebrate Holy Cross Day. It is a feast on the liturgical calendar that commemorates the dedication of the site where the original cross and tomb of Christ was discovered. During the reign of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to profess a Christian faith, his mother Helena traveled to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. There she discovered what was believed to be the place of Christ's Crucifixion and burial, and had built over them, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was dedicated on this day in September of the year 335.

A bit odd don't you think, that we should celebrate a place of suffering and death? But the cross has become a symbol of triumph, of Christ's victory over death, and a reminder of His promise, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." We honor Holy Cross Day not only as our namesake, but because this spirit of universal welcome inspires our mission. To embody Christ's promise, we too, must walk the way of the cross.

In the gospel this morning we hear from Jesus what this means, to walk the way of the cross. To give you a little context, just before this passage, Jesus went to the home of Mary and Martha and found his friends weeping over the death of their brother Lazarus. When Jesus called him out of the tomb and back to life, word traveled quickly to the Pharisees and chief priests and they feared his growing influence and power. This was a turning point that put in motion a plan to put Jesus to death.

When he entered into Jerusalem, knowing his hour had come, this final teaching had more urgency. The time for sitting at table with his friends was over and now he looked ahead to the cross. The fulfillment of his mission and purpose revolved around this cross and his embrace of sacrificial love. What an ironic twist of power to humble himself in surrender for the sake of others. This was not the Messiah they expected, no mighty warrior ready for battle. Jesus revealed God's strength through vulnerability, God's power through servanthood, God's justice through love. He called his followers to do the same. "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

Are we to take from this that following Jesus means depriving ourselves of things that create enjoyment, engaging in long faced religion or a life of silent suffering? I think rather he is suggesting that life as it has been sold to us by our culture: power, wealth, achievement, isn't what brings meaning and purpose. If you have ever gained these things and lost them, you know this lesson all too well. When we can die to those illusions, we are prepared to receive abundant life and walk as Jesus puts it as "children of light."

It is strangely comforting to know that God understands suffering and thus walks beside us in solidarity. And we are called to walk beside others in the name of Christ. Each time we give up ourselves or our needs for the sake of another; parents for your children, spouses for one another, to help a friend, to make room for someone new, to welcome a stranger; a little death gives way to new life. This is the triumph of the cross, and Jesus draws us closer.

St John of the Cross, a Spanish mystic and Friar in the 1500's wrote the poem *The Dark Night of the Soul* while imprisoned for his efforts at social reform in the Catholic faith. John was abducted by authorities, beaten and held captive in solitary confinement. He wrote of his spiritual journey, the dark night, describing hardships the soul meets in detachment from the world to reach the

light of union with God. When he could no longer see a path or read the maps he charted for his life, God drew him to new vision, new life.

Likewise from the confines of a prison cell many years later, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote these words of inspiration for the cause of civil rights. "Being a follower of Jesus means taking up the cross, bear it for truth, for justice, bear it for peace." His wife Coretta shared this story of his dark night of the soul. *"After a difficult day he came home bone-weary from the stress of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In the middle of that night, he was awakened by a threatening phone call, one of many we received throughout the movement. Martin had had enough.*

After the call, he got up from bed and made some coffee. He began to worry about his family and all of the burdens he carried. With his head in his hands, Martin bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud to God: "Lord, I am taking a stand for what I believe is right. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I have come to the point where I can't face it alone." Later he told me, "At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as never before. It seemed as though I could hear a voice saying: 'Stand up for righteousness; stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.' When Martin stood up from the table, he was imbued with a new sense of confidence, and was ready to face anything."

As we celebrate this Holy Cross Day, I invite you to consider your spiritual journey and the deaths and resurrections you have encountered. Give thanks to the One who has gone before us and who walks with us in solidarity. We bear the name and the responsibility of the holy Cross, to live as Children of the light, to practice the spirit of universal welcome, drawing all to the love of God. How might Christ be calling you to lose your life?

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.