



LENTEN REFLECTIONS



Prayers and Reflections for the Season of Lent. Vicariate Apostolic of Kuwait. All Rights Reserved.

THE CROSS

"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

-- Galatians 6:14

By understanding why Jesus died on the Cross, we come face-to-face with the unconditional and total love of God for humanity. As Christians, the Cross is, for us, forever an emblem of love, humility and obedience. To be true disciples of Christ, means to take up OUR CROSS and follow Him, in humility, patience and love. This Reflection consists of three sections - Why Jesus died for us; Why Jesus was Lifted Up on a Cross; and the Transforming Power of the Cross.

Each section concludes with a short prayer.



Why Did Jesus Die?

When I look at Jesus on the Cross, I ask, "Why? .. Why, You, Lord, What did You do to deserve such a cruel death?" I feel ashamed and guilty, because, I know that it was my place that Jesus took. My place on the Cross. It was my suffering that He bore. It was my Cross that He carried ..

JESUS' DEATH IS AN OUTPOURING OF IMMENSE LOVE

Jesus' human heart was filled with the Father's love. All through His lifetime, Jesus reflected God's love for the people by the mercy and kindness He showed them, even to the end. It is this love that enabled Him to give His life freely for all. For "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus' sacrifice also expresses His loving communion with the Father. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life", said the Lord, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 10:17; 14:31).

JESUS' DEATH IS IN FULFILLMENT OF DIVINE PURPOSE AND PROPHECY

The death of Christ was accomplished in the mind of God before creation. Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan. Christ is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

Jesus' salvific death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant (Is 53:7-8). St. Paul professes that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures." St. Peter explains to the Jews of Jerusalem in his first sermon on

Pentecost: "This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

Thus, Jesus's death is the very purpose of the Incarnation. It is the reason that Christ came into the world in the first place. From the first moment of His Incarnation, the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in His redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34).

JESUS DIED FOR THE SINS OF ALL MANKIND

Jesus paid our sin debt in full. Matthew 26:28 says Jesus blood would be shed for many "for remission of sins".

At the end of the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus recalled that God's love excludes no one: "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that not one of these little ones should perish." He affirms that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many". The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer."

JESUS DIED THAT ALL MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

Genesis 2:17 tells us that the effect of eating the forbidden fruit was spiritual death (for all mankind) and the penalty for disobedience to God was eternal separation from Him. We have earned eternal death but God in His mercy provided a means for us to be reconciled back to Him and to enjoy life eternal - through the death of His Son Jesus (Romans 6:23).

In the Old Testament the Hebrews were instructed to sacrifice a lamb as an atonement for their sins. They would have to do this often. This lamb sacrifice was a substitute which was looking forward to God's true lamb sacrifice: His Son Jesus, sinless and blameless, who would be crucified on the cross for all of man's sins in the past, the present, and the future. "God laid on him the sins of us all" (Is 53:6).

It may be recalled that, John the Baptist, after agreeing to baptize Jesus along with the sinners, looked at Jesus and pointed Him out as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant (Is 53:7-8) who silently allows Himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes; and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover.

JESUS DIED TO "HAND OVER HIS SPIRIT"

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Cor 15:45)

After Jesus' death and just before His ascension, Jesus promised His disciples: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus, after being exalted at the right hand of God, received the promise of the Holy Spirit, and poured out the Spirit on His disciples.

This is the same Spirit that Christians receive at Baptism. Thus they are aided and receive power through the Holy Spirit. They can abound in hope through His power. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

PRAYER :

**RAISED UPON THE CROSS, O MASTER,
THROUGH THE WOOD YOU QUENCHED THE FLAME OF SIN!
SUFFERING DEATH BY YOUR OWN CHOICE,
YOU HAVE SLAIN THE ENEMY!
THEREFORE I ENTREAT YOU:
PUT TO DEATH MY SINFUL WAYS;
ENLIVEN MY MISERABLE HEART,
CLEANSING ME FROM ALL DEFILEMENT;
FOR YOU ARE THE MERCIFUL ONE!**

Why Was Jesus Lifted Up On A Cross?

"My Suffering Jesus: Why the Cross? Why did You die such a shameful and painful death?" Every time I look at You on the Cross, I imagine Your anguish and Your excruciating pain, yet only You knew what it was to suffer it. My Sweet Jesus, how terrible must my sins be, for You to have suffered so much!"

Christ humbled himself in His death, having been betrayed by Judas, forsaken by His disciples, scorned and rejected by the world, condemned by Pilate, and tormented by His persecutors; having also conflicted with the terrors of death, and the powers of darkness, felt and borne the weight of God's wrath, He laid down His life as an offering for sin, enduring the painful, shameful, and cursed death of the cross... For this Word would be fulfilled: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32).

What is it that "draws" us to the Condemned One in agony on the Cross? How is it that, generation after generation, this appalling sight has drawn countless hosts of people who have made the Cross the hallmark of their faith? Hosts of men and women who for centuries have lived and given their lives looking to this sign?

The Cross. The instrument of a shameful death. It was not lawful to condemn a Roman citizen to death by crucifixion: it was too humiliating. The moment that Jesus took up the Cross in order to carry it to Calvary marked a turning-point in the history of the Cross. The symbol of a shameful death, reserved for the lowest classes, the Cross became a sign of victory and a crown of glory!

The Cross is a divine lesson in obedience and humility. Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8). For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19). By submitting to death, Jesus had destroyed its power, thereby making eternal life available to everyone. The Cross, an emblem of suffering and shame became the centerpiece of God's plan of redemption. Christ suffered to leave us a divine example of every virtue which we could imitate - love, charity, humility, obedience, patience and forbearance.

St. Luke notes: "When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). While he "ascends" to the Holy City, where his "exodus" from this life will be accomplished, Jesus already sees the goal, Heaven, but He knows that the path that brings him back to the glory of God passes through the Cross, through obedience to the divine plan of love for humanity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "the lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it" (n. 661). We too must be clear in our Christian life, that to enter into the glory of God requires daily fidelity to His will, even when it requires sacrifice. The Ascension of Jesus actually happened on the Mount of Olives, near the place where He had retired in prayer before His passion to be in profound union with the Father;

once again we see that prayer gives us the grace to faithfully live out God's plan for us.

Jesus offers us His Cross as our lifeline of hope and salvation. He gave Nicodemus a sign that he could not miss. Jesus tells him: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9), so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-16)

Let us examine Numbers 21:7-9 -- And the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. --

In like manner, Jesus had to be lifted up on the Cross so that He could heal us of our sins. Just as the brass serpent was raised on the pole for the healing of Israel, so Jesus was raised on the Cross for the healing of the world. When Nicodemus saw Christ on that Cross he understood and believed.

As we prepare for Easter, can you see Jesus on that Cross? Look at him on that Cross. Be like Nicodemus - understand and believe. He was lifted up on that Cross for you, He was lifted up on that Cross for me. He was lifted up on that Cross to heal us from all our sins.

PRAYER :

**BY YOUR OWN FREE CHOICE, COMPASSIONATE CHRIST,
YOU ENDURED A SHAMEFUL DEATH UPON THE CROSS.
WHEN YOUR MOTHER SAW YOU, SHE WAS WOUNDED IN HER HEART.
BEATING HER BREAST. SHE LAMENTED WITH MOTHERLY SORROW!
AT HER PRAYERS, THROUGH YOUR TENDER MERCY,
HAVE PITY ON THE WORLD ,
AND SAVE US; HEAL US FROM OUR SIN!**

The Cross - A Sign Of Contradiction

Every time I look at the Cross, it gives me courage and hope. When I look at Jesus on the Cross, my heart is filled with all that is beautiful - Truth, Justice, Beauty and Love. I cry out from the depth of my being, "My Sweet Jesus, how can I ever repay Your Goodness?"

The Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is a sign of contradiction to the values and principles of the world. It shows how God can bring good out of evil, order out of chaos, meaning out of absurdity, and life out of death. God's infinite power comes to us in the human powerlessness of Jesus Christ born wrapped in swaddling clothes at the beginning of His life on earth, and in His powerlessness in being nailed to the Cross at the end of His life here on earth. The Cross stands at the very summit of Christ's saving entrance into our humanity - and it stands at the very bottom of Christ's degradation. The Cross confounds non-believers, it frightens the proud, it is an object of scorn and ridicule for the evil mind.

And yet the Cross of Jesus Christ is a sign of peace, a sign with which we bless ourselves, our children, our homes, and all things we hold dear. Pre-eminently the Cross is proof of how far it is that God our Father has gone to prove His love for you and me. Strangely, mysteriously, and in a seemingly contradictory way, the Cross is a sign of Love. No. It is not merely a sign or a symbol, it is the ultimate proof of God's love for us.

The Cross summons us to change the way we see things. It urges us, challenges us, and demands us to look at the world in a vision and in a way that departs from the vision we might have under a different and secular perspective. It calls us to look at our relationships with others, to look at life, and to see death in ways that are inside-out and upside-down from those who have no faith, and who are forced to see them through the eyes of fear.

Death, under the Cross, is not an ending, it is a beginning. Suffering, pain and loss under the Cross, are no longer things that separate us from God, they unite us to Him. Tragedy under the cross is not ultimate, it is only temporary. Sin under the cross no longer alienates us from God, it occasions His coming to us in the midst of our sins in His merciful love.

Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is victim no more. Why, then, should we consider ourselves to be victims? Under the Cross there are no more victims! For the wood of the Tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden and the wood of the crib in Christ's nativity in Bethlehem has become the wood of the Cross that overcomes all that would separate us from the loving Presence of God in Christ. Christ, victim no more, reigns triumphant from the Cross.

PRAYER :

**JESUS, LORD AND LOVER OF MANKIND,
INTERCEDE FERVENTLY BEFORE THE FATHER FOR US -
THAT OUR PRAYERS MAY BE ACCEPTED
AS PURE AND SWEET-SMELLING INCENSE;
THAT WE MAY ALL BE ACCOUNTED WORTHY
TO VENERATE THE LIFE-GIVING CROSS
AND TO BEHOLD IT WITH REVERENCE AND LOVE.
SEND DOWN ON US, THEN, YOUR MERCY, O SAVIOR,
AS THE LOVER OF MANKIND.**

CONCLUSION:

Do you ever wonder why the Church keeps the body of Christ represented on the Cross? Well, it is because on it humanity remains naked and exposed. Humanity has not yet fully received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that Christ handed over when He died on the Cross. Humanity has not yet allowed itself to be raised in glory by the power of God. Until that day comes, we, the children of Adam and Eve, know that we are naked. We need to see ourselves up on that Cross. Until that day comes the silence of the angels will continue and heaven will wait in the stillness of expectation, holding its breath for our response.

Picture of the Cross:

Courtesy: www.freefoto.com