

The Glory of the Cross

They had heard the legends and the tales of this mystical substance, but as the centuries passed through the ages its power remained elusive. We are speaking here of those alchemists in the middle ages who tried to create what was known as the 'Philosopher's Stone'. This 'Stone' was deemed valuable to many because it had the power to transform ordinary metals, like iron and tin, into precious metals, like silver and gold. But more intriguingly, this 'Philosopher's Stone' was believed to have the properties of the Elixir of Life wherein one's earthly existence was extended, the qualities of one's youth was restored and, maybe, even maybe, one was granted the gift of immortality.

But little did they know that something greater than the Philosopher's Stone had already been revealed...

In 1596, the Buddhist, Japanese emperor felt threatened by Christianity's growth in his land and so he unleashed a wave of persecution. He forced 26 Christians to traverse for over 1000 km from Kyoto through the freezing cold with bloodied feet until they had reached the city of Nagasaki. On top of the hill could be seen 26 crosses awaiting those 26 victims. Among the group, there were several young altar servers 10 and 13 years old and it has been said that when those two altar servers saw those crosses, they commanded their executors, "SHOW ME MY CROSS". Once they were pointed out to them and *to the amazement of the onlookers*, those two altar servers and many of the condemned JOYFULLY ran up to their cross and ***embraced it.***

Eventually all 26 of them were fastened to the cross and pierced in their sides, and now they are known as St. Paul Miki and his companions. Nonetheless, WE are left with such an evocative question: ***Why should I embrace the cross?*** What do those Christians see that we do not see?

We live in a world where *we treat pain and suffering* and that is a good thing. We should decrease the suffering and alleviate the burden of those who experience it. But, if we cannot reduce it then we tolerate the suffering, we endure the trial. *But to embrace the cross? Embrace unavoidable suffering?* That is a different story. To the world and maybe to us, that may seem like sheer madness.

We have all been immersed in the darkness of suffering whether it is physical, spiritual or psychological, or even the sickness or loss of a loved one. For some of us, the darkness may feel like a thick shroud from which it feels like we cannot escape. Even in Canada, we have despaired in the face of suffering. To empathize with the suffering we ethanize the suffering using *the ambiguous, sentimental terms of 'assisted dying'*.

EMBRACE THE CROSS!?!? Our culture says, 'CERTAINLY NOT!'

Embracing the cross is as puzzling as our Lord's reaction after Judas had left the upper room to betray him. Jesus almost rejoices and says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him". (Passion of Christ scene). Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame (Heb 12:2).

*Jesus is about to endure the **most horrific torture** ever experienced on the face of this earth, yet Jesus says that this is the **moment of his glorification**? Why did Jesus desire to embrace his cross?*

Jesus embraced his cross because he saw the necessity of suffering in our fallen human lives. Suffering is a fact of life. It is the result of the earthquake of original sin, the sin of Adam and Eve, which has sent destructive waves throughout all of time and space, throughout all of creation and all of humanity. But because Jesus knew that we would all have to come face to face with suffering in our life, he willingly chose to be present in our suffering WITH us.

This is the ultimate answer to our suffering. When we suffer we ask two questions: why am I suffering and where are you? And it will feel like we are in a dark prison all alone where God is silent to our cries. Yet Jesus experiences the depth of our suffering with us by asking the same questions: my God my God, WHY have you FORSAKEN me? If we took the time to look around in the darkness we would slowly see the shadow, the silhouette of the Son of Man who was always waiting there for us in our suffering.

C.S. Lewis said it beautifully: I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You yourself are the answer.

Paul Claudel: Jesus did not come to explain away **suffering**, or to remove it. He came to fill it with His presence."

Jesus did not save us APART from suffering but THROUGH suffering so that not even suffering, persecution or trial could separate us from his love. Jesus embraced his suffering to embrace us in our suffering. Jesus embraced his suffering so that we can truly say: Jesus I do not know why I am suffering, and it doesn't make sense, but I know you are here and I can feel your embrace. That is why St. Paul Miki and his companions could joyfully embrace their crosses, why the martyrs of the Church could courageously give up their lives because suffering is no longer empty or meaningless—it is now full of the glory of God's presence.

When Jesus embraced his cross and revealed the glory of his presence in it, he also INFUSED it with his divine love. Suffering and death which had led to DESPAIR has now been transformed into surrender—transformed into THE ***self-sacrificial love of the Son***. This divine Love has infused NEW salvific meaning and NEW redemptive value in all human suffering. Did you know that your sufferings united with Jesus Christ contribute to the salvation of the world?

Look at the stain glass. Without the light, the stain glass remains darkened by the night. But when the rays of light shine through the stain glass, what was once empty has been given new vibrancy, new beauty, new glory. Therefore, allow the glory of God to radiate through the stain-glass of our sufferings because what was once darkened by despair has been illumined with the glory of divine love and will shine forth with redemptive brilliance.

“In bringing about Redemption through suffering, *Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of Redemption*. Thus each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ” (St. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 19).

As we prepare for the liturgy of the Eucharist, we are mindful that the mystery of God's glory desires to reside in our heart. As the rays of the resurrection shone forth so brightly in the darkness of that tomb to overcome death, let Jesus, the Light of the world, enter into the suffering in our lives to dispel the shadows of meaningless and despair. For he can give us the courage and the grace to embrace our cross since he is able transform OUR despair into hope, OUR suffering into salvation, and OUR death into eternal life.

Now we can triumphantly say: “Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?... thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:55-57) because “Whoever eats [his] flesh and drinks [his] blood has eternal life, and [he] will raise [us] up on the last day” (Jn 6:54).

For something greater than the Philosopher's Stone is here...