

## 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 image of embracing the cross. Tonight we want to ask ourselves: ***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. We should try as much as possible to reduce the pain through aspirins and morphine, and if we cannot 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 loss of a loved one and for some of us there may seem to be **no hope, no light**. Even in our country, 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". *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?

When Jesus says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified" he is saying, "The time has come for the GLORY OF GOD to be revealed IN and THROUGH me." From the foundation of the world, God desired to reveal the innermost mystery of who he is to us: **the mystery of his glory**. The Israelites saw flashes of his glory on Mount Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments or when the glory of the Lord filled the temple but it was mainly in a form of a cloud which veiled the glory of God.

Moses even desired to see the fullness of God's glory and said, "I pray thee, show me thy GLORY". But God responded, "You cannot see my FACE, for man shall not see me and live" (Ex 33:17-23). *The glory of God referred to the majestic beauty and magnificence of God, **the glorious FACE of God**, but it was always veiled before the coming of Christ.*

But NOW the time has come for God to unveil his beauty, his glory, for the whole world to see but *how does he choose to do it?* Through the death of the only beloved Son on the Cross. The Cross is not just a symbol of destruction and torture; *it has been transformed to reveal the glory of God. The **mystery of God's heart, is laid bare on that Cross**: the mystery of a Father who loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son; the mystery of the Son who obediently makes the ultimate gift of himself in self-sacrificial love to the Father for the entire world; and the mystery of the Holy Spirit who is the fire of Love between the Father and Son that consumes the sacrifice of the cross to make it a fragrant, burnt offering. **The moment of Jesus' glorification is the moment when he unveils the MYSTERY and the GLORY of our God who is Love.***

When Jesus embraced his cross and revealed the glory of God, he also INFUSED it with his divine love. Suffering and death which had led to DESPAIR has now been transformed into an expression of 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 broken and dark places of our hearts to dispel its shadows. 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.

*“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...*