

The cross of Christ is not something we endure, but something we take up.

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” No wonder Peter wanted Jesus to change his tune...we all want to avoid pain and suffering...Madison Avenue would not welcome Jesus’ way of advertising or attracting followers. There is an important concept here – a concept at the heart of Christianity: taking up the cross.

But we can be confused about the cross we take up – confused in two ways: first we try to avoid it all together. But notice...and here is a little piece of theology – the cross is never inflicted on us – it is never just a hardship of life. God does not give us crosses that we have not chosen – that’s not a cross – that’s just life. God has given us free will, which means that we have the ability to say yes and say no. We do not always choose wisely, but we can choose. And some of what we choose is to avoid the cross – to avoid doing what we know in our hearts we are called to do. Cross avoidance is a refusal to enter into our life, not

anyone else’s, more deeply. Jesus tells us that as the Christ he came so that we could have life and have it more abundantly. Suffering is part of life, life that we have abundantly. But this does not mean that unnecessary suffering is part of life. We get no extra credit by choosing suffering that is not ours. That is simply another way to avoid the cross.

Besides avoiding the cross, the second tendency we have is false cross-bearing. One of my favorite expressions is: “Get down off the cross, someone else needs the wood!” It is a tonic against our own grandiosity in suffering, against the insidious nature of false cross-bearing that we are prone to practice. Cross-bearing is not the way to become more spiritual. Living life fully is. Cross-bearing is not an act of penance, taken up with the hope of “personal growth.” Cross-bearing is not that exhalation of breath, accompanied by, “Well, I guess this is just my cross to bear.”

Crosses are not always the difficulties that befall us: difficult children, unemployment, disease or injury. The scope and impact of these events on our lives do not automatically make them crosses. As one theologian said, “Jesus does not tell us merely to bear the cross, but to take it up. Life is full of burdens we have to bear, because we can’t escape them.” That does not make

them crosses. When we allow those burdens to transform us out of death into new life, then they may become the cross that we take up in Jesus – but not until then.

At the 9:00 a.m. Mass this weekend, each of our Candidates for full communion is handed the cross in our midst and asked a question: “Do you wish to see your life and struggles in the light of the crucified Savior whom you embraced in baptism? Do you wish to follow this crucified and risen Lord?” And you know, they each say yes. And their yes is not just their yes – it is our yes because as soon as it is uttered we acclaim their faith that enables us to believe more firmly still.

Gaze upon the Crucified in the front of our building. Do we wish to see our struggles in the light of the cross of Jesus as transforming us and the world we touch? It’s a decision for each of us right now. Gaze upon the cross for a moment in silence and let us pray.

Good and gracious God, grant us the strength of your son Jesus, the faith of his Mother Mary and of the saints, that all our sufferings and struggles might be transformed to become an embrace of the cross of Jesus your son in whose name we pray now and forever. Amen.

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