

By Father Charles Bowes
Numbers 21:4b-9
Philippians 2:6-11
John 3:13-17

It is in the midst of the struggle that the gift is received.

What can possibly be glorious about suffering or death? Here at the Eucharist we celebrate a hanging. How absurd to celebrate something like that! It makes no sense. This solemnity of the triumph of the Cross is not a triumph or exaltation over death in the abstract - as if it were something we know and out of that knowledge we can now live, no, no. Here, then, is the first triumph of the Cross. The Cross conquers us. The Cross proclaims that God would do anything for us. In the words of Saint Augustine, God loves each of us as if there is only one of us. The Cross conquers not death in the abstract but our death, and reveals God's love through whatever suffering we encounter in our human lives.

It may be the mountain of laundry you face every day or your child's tuition bill. It could take the form of the textbooks that you use to teach your students, the tools you wield at the construction site, the computer that produces the reports and graphics that keep your business humming along.

For some, it is the wheelchair required to maneuver through life or the medicine needed just to survive. Yours may be the soup you make to serve at

the local shelter or the soccer ball you use to coach a team of excited six and seven year olds.

Some of the most beautiful ones are the ear that always listens to another's troubles, the shoulder always available for one to cry on, the smile that readily comforts, the heart that always breaks with another's.

Believe it or not, spouses are sometimes big ones for one another; good friends readily accept each other as one. They are crosses. We tend to think of crosses as burdens - things and people - that demand so much energy and time from us. Most days we would like to lay those crosses aside and never pick them up again. But these crosses all have one thing in common: They are not something gotten rid of, but rather something lived with, and their transformation into glory is God's work, not ours. God will provide. God is faithful as revealed in Jesus. This is the greatest and the first triumph of the Cross - over our struggle to trust that God loves us so much and will bring out of our struggles whatever form resurrection is to take.

We may stumble when we try to express what the Cross means to us. But the saints and poets come to our aid. Saint John Vianney sees the Cross as our ladder to heaven. Saint Ephrem the Syrian sees it as a bridge laid down by Christ so that souls might pass over the

chasm between “the dwelling of death and the dwelling of eternal life.” For the poet John Donne, the Cross becomes an anchor that secures us to Christ like boats sheltered in a harbor. And for the Carmelite poet Jessica Powers, the Cross is the “badge of the friends of the Man of Sorrows.”

Jesus grows no older, but is forever caught in the one moment of his passage through death to life. That moment is available to us always and everywhere, whenever we turn our attention to the Lord - especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. We bring our crosses to communion today as we share with one another the faith that sustains us. May our “amen” allow the Cross to triumph over us.

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