

*The Virtue of Charity— “There is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend”*

# The Triumph of The Holy Cross

## Outline of Events:

5:30—Mass  
 6:45— Meal  
 7:20—Skit  
 7:30—Talk  
 7:40—Reflection  
 7:45—P&W  
 8:00—Small Group  
 8:30—Prayer in  
 Small Groups

## Main Points

- Jesus Christ’s “most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us.” The cross surpasses all other sacrifices. It is the gift of God the Father, the offering of the Son of God made man, through the Holy Spirit “in reparation for our disobedience.”
- It is the perfect expression of love, the “giving of one’s self for another.” Love, thus, is sacrifice.
- Through the cross, evil, sin, and death are defeated. Hope is restored. Life is given anew.
- Jesus’ work on the cross was perfect. We are called, however, complete what is lacking— distribute this perfect work “to each of his members throughout time....Jesus’ work on the cross is ‘finished,’ as he said, but that does not preclude our participation in his work....Not only are we called to suffer like Jesus, i.e., in imitation of him, but we are called to suffer *with* Jesus, to participate in the one redeeming sacrifice of Calvary.”
- The crucifix is a vivid reminder of the “very essence of salvation,” and when blessed and prayerfully revered, confers on the faithful the spiritual effects of a sacrament.

## Lesson Content

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***“We adore You, O Christ, and praise You, Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.”***

**— The Way of the Cross —**

## Excerpt from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### 613

Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,"<sup>439</sup> and the *sacrifice of the New Covenant*, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."<sup>440</sup>

### 614

This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices.<sup>441</sup> First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.<sup>442</sup>

*Jesus substitutes his obedience for our disobedience*

### 615

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."<sup>443</sup> By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "makes himself an *offering for sin*," when "he bore the sin of many," and who "shall make many to be accounted righteous," for "he shall bear their iniquities."<sup>444</sup> Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father.<sup>445</sup>

*Jesus consummates his sacrifice on the Cross*

### 616

It is love "to the end"<sup>446</sup> that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life.<sup>447</sup> Now "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died."<sup>448</sup> No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*.

### 617

The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of Christ's sacrifice as "the source of eternal salvation"<sup>449</sup> and teaches that "his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us."<sup>450</sup> And the Church venerates his cross as it sings: "Hail, O Cross, our only hope."<sup>451</sup>

*Our participation in Christ's sacrifice*

### 618

The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men."<sup>452</sup> But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men.<sup>453</sup> He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him],"<sup>454</sup> for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps."<sup>455</sup> In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries.<sup>456</sup> This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.<sup>457</sup>

Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.<sup>458</sup>

## IN BRIEF

### 619

"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3).

### 620

Our salvation flows from God's initiative of love for us, because "he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19).

### 621

Jesus freely offered himself for our salvation. Beforehand, during the Last Supper, he both symbolized this offering and made it really present: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19).

### 622

The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), that is, he "loved [his own] to the end" (Jn 13:1), so that they might be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers" (1 Pet 1:18).

### 623

By his loving obedience to the Father, "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfills the atoning mission (cf. Isa 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will "make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11; cf. Rom 5:19).

# The Divine Romance: The Pulpit of the Cross

By Servant of God, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Our Blessed Lord during His mortal life chose many varied and picturesque pulpits from which to deliver His sermons, the Words of Eternal Life. Sometimes His pulpit was Peter's bark pushed out into the sea; at other times, it was the crowded streets of Jericho; on another occasion, the golden gate of the Temple; and on still another Jacob's well. It seemed as if almost any pulpit pleased Him, until the day came for Him to deliver His last and farewell address to the world. Then He would not be content with *any* pulpit; then He would demand a pulpit, which, like the words He was uttering, would be remembered down through the arches of the years. And on that Good Friday morning, as He stood on the sunlit portico of Pontius Pilate, perhaps He thought of making that portico the pulpit of His last and farewell address to the world. There was a vast sea of faces before Him and hearts hungering for the Bread of Eternal Life; there was an audience like unto which any one would have loved to open his heart.

But, no, He would not make that portico the pulpit of His last and farewell address. He would wait for a few hours, for another pulpit, which would be given Him at the foot of the steps of Pilate's palace; and that pulpit He would put upon His shoulders and carry to Golgotha. That pulpit would be — the Cross. Once on those heights He offered Himself to His executioners. Hands of the Carpenter hardened by toil; hands from which the world's graces flow; feet of the Miracle Worker that went about doing good and that trod the Everlasting Hills — now had the rough nails applied to them. The first knock of the hammer is heard in silence; blow follows blow and is faintly reechoed over the city walls beneath. Mary and John hold their ears. The sound is unendurable; each echo sounds as another stroke. The cross is lifted slowly off the ground, staggers for a moment in mid-air, and then, with a thud that seemed to shake even hell itself, it sinks into the pit prepared for it. Our Blessed Lord has mounted His pulpit for the last time — and what a majestic pulpit it is! In itself the Cross is a sermon. How much more eloquently it speaks now when adorned with the Word of Eternal Life!

Like all who mount their pulpits, He o'er looks His audience. Far off in the distance, down over the Valley of Jehosaphat and over on the other side of the valley, He could see the gilded roof of the Temple reflecting its rays against the sun, which was soon to hide its face in shame. Here and there on Temple walls He caught glimpses of figures straining their eyes to catch the last view of Him whom the darkness knew not. Nearer the pulpit, but off at the border of the crowd, stood some of His own timid disciples ready to flee in case of danger. Greeks and Romans were there, too, as well as Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. There were Temple priests in the crowd asking Him to come down and prove His Divinity. There were the Deity-blind, mocking and spitting at Him. There were some who had followed Him for an hour, taunting Him that others He saved but Himself He could not save. There were Roman soldiers throwing dice for the garments of a God. And there at the foot of the cross stood that wounded flower, that broken thing, Magdalen, forgiven because she loved much. And there, with a face like a cast moulded out of love, was John. And there, God pity her, was His own Mother. Mary, Magdalen, and John. Innocence, penitence, and priesthood — the three types of souls forever to be found beneath the Cross of Christ.

All is silence now. The Scribes and Pharisees cease their raillery, the Roman soldiers put away their dice. The sky is darkened and men grow fearful. They are awaiting the farewell address of the Son of God. He begins to speak, but like all men who die, He thinks of those whom He loves most. His first word was a word about His enemies: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." His second word was about sinners as He spoke to a thief: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." And the thief died a thief, for he stole Paradise! His third word was to His saints. It was the new Annunciation: "Woman, behold thy son." As the sermon went on, it seemed to gain in emphasis about the love of God for man; and at this particular point that we are now considering, when He began to speak, it was not a curse upon those who crucified Him; it was not a word of reproach to the timid disciples off at the border of the crowd; it was not a word of withering scorn to those who taunted and mocked Him; it was not a proud prophetic word of power to those who taunted His weakness; it was not a word of hate to the Roman soldiers; it was not a word of hope to Magdalen; it was not a word of love to John; it was not a word of farewell to His own Mother; it was not even to God at this moment — it was to man; and out from the abundance of the Sacred Heart there welled the cry of cries: "I thirst."

He, the God-man, He who holds the earth in the palm of His hand, He from whose fingertips have tumbled planets and worlds, He who threw the stars into their orbits, and spheres into space — now asks man, a piece of His own handiwork, to help Him. He asks man for a drink. Not a drink of earthly water — that is not what He wants — but a drink of love: 'I thirst for love.'

There is perhaps no word in the English language that is more often used and more often misunderstood than the word that rang out from the Pulpit of the Cross on that day: The simple word, love. Love as the world understands it means to have, to own, to possess: To have that object, to own that thing, to possess that person, for the particular pleasure which it will give. That is not love; that is selfishness; that is sin. Love is not the desire to have, to own, to possess. Love is the desire to be had, to be owned, to be possessed. Love is the giving of oneself for the sake of another. Love as the world understands it, is symbolized by a circle, which is always circumscribed by self. Love as our Lord understands it, is symbolized by the Cross with its arms outstretched even unto infinity to embrace all humanity within its grasp. As long as we have a body, then love can never mean anything else but sacrifice. That is why we speak of "arrows" and "darts" of love — something that wounds.

But if love, in its highest reaches, means sacrifice, then these words of Our Blessed Lord from the Cross are the climax of Love's ways with unloving men. Love did not keep the secret of Its goodness — that was creation. Love became one with the one loved — and that was the Incarnation. But if Love had merely stopped with God becoming man, we might say that God did not do everything He could do to show His love; we might say that He was like the heathen gods that sat indifferent to the woes and ills and heartaches of the world and hence never drew from the heart of man a beat of love. If Divine Love stopped after merely appearing amongst us, man might say that God could never understand the sufferings and the loneliness of a human heart; that a God could not love as men do, namely, to the point of sacrifice. If, therefore, Love was to give of its fullness, it must express Itself even to the point of sacrificing Itself for the salvation and redemption of mankind. If, therefore, He who suffered on Calvary, He who was now preaching from the Pulpit of the Cross, were not God but a mere creature or a mere man, then there must be creatures in this world better and nobler than God. Shall man who toils for his fellowman, suffers for him, and if needs be dies for him, be capable of doing that which God cannot do? Should this noblest form of love, which is sacrifice, be possible to sinful man, and yet impossible to a perfectly good God? Shall we say that the martyr sprinkling the sands of the Colosseum with his blood, the soldier dying for his country, the missionary spending himself and being spent for the good of heathens — aye, and more, shall we say that those women, martyrs by pain, who in little hovels and lowly cottages have sacrificed all the joys of life for the sake of simple duties and little charities, unnoticed and unknown by all save God — shall we say that all those, who from the beginning of the world have shown forth the beauty of sacrifice, have no Divine prototype in heaven? That they have been capable of displaying a nobler form of love than He who made them? That they have shown greater love than Love Itself? Shall we say this? Or shall we say with John and Paul, that if man can be so good, God must be infinitely better; that if man can love so much, God can love infinitely more? Shall we not say this, and find in the Cross of Calvary the perfect expression of love by an All-Perfect Being, of whom perfect condescension and sacrifice were required by naught in heaven or earth save by His own perfect and inconceivable love which He now preaches from the Pulpit of the Cross? If we do say this, that He is very God of very God, and love is now reaching its climax in the redemption of mankind, then no longer can men say, "Why does God send men into the world to be miserable when He is happy?" — for the God-man is miserable now. No longer can men say, "God makes me suffer pain while He goes through none" — for the God-man is now enduring pain to the utmost. No longer can men say that God has a heart that cannot understand, for now His own Sacred Heart understands what it is to be abandoned by God and man as He suffers — suspended between the kingdoms of both, between heaven and earth, rejected by one and abandoned by the other. Now it is true to say of Love Itself that It is really dying for us, for greater love than this no man hath that a man lay down his life for his friend.

The drama of that day is an abiding one. For Calvary is not just a mere historical incident, like the battle of Waterloo; it is not something, which has happened — it is something, which is also happening. Christ is still on the cross.

"Whenever there is silence around me  
 By day or by night —  
 I am startled by a cry.  
 It came down from the cross —  
 The first time I heard it.  
 I went out and searched —  
 And found a man in the throes of crucifixion  
 And I said, 'I will take you down',  
 And I tried to take the nails out of his feet.  
 But He said, 'Let them be  
 For I cannot be taken down  
 Until every man, every woman, and every child  
 Come together to take me down.'  
 And I said, 'But I cannot bear your cry,  
 What can I do?'  
 And He said, 'Go about the world —  
 Tell every one that you meet —  
 That there is a man on the cross.'"

Because of sin Christ dies again; for as St. Paul reminds us, as often as we sin we "are crucifying again to [ourselves] the Son of God." The scars are still open. "Earth's pain still stands deified"; and still, like falling stars, Christ's blood-drops crimson the robes of other Johns and the hair of other Magdalens. As long as earth wears wounds, still must Christ's wounds remain; for each new sin draws aside the curtain of another crucifixion. Christ is still on trial in the hearts of men, and every sin is another act by which Barrabas is preferred to Christ. There still are other Judases who blister His lips with a kiss, there still are other Pilates who condemn Him as an enemy of Caesar, there still are other Herods who robe Him in the garment of a fool, there still are gambling idlers who cast their dice, gambling away the riches of eternity for the baubles of time, there still are other Calvaries — for sin is the crucifixion over again. Arms that are outstretched to bless, we nail fast. Feet that would seek us in the devious ways of sin, we dig with steel. Eyes that would look longingly after us as we set out for foreign countries, like other prodigals, we fill with dust. Lips that would speak to us words of tender pleading and forgiveness, we burn with gall. A heart that would pant for us as if we were fountains of living waters, we pierce with a lance. And when the last nail has been driven and Christ, like a wounded eagle, is unfurled upon His banner of salvation, we begin to say in our own heart of hearts that after all He could not be God, for if He were God how could we have crucified Him? With the job of sinning done, which means the crucifixion, we make our way down the hill of Calvary and then there comes, not the quake of earth but the quake of conscience, which makes us say in our soul with the Centurion: "Indeed this man was the Son of God." As uneasiness and remorse creep upon us, we look back to Calvary and wonder why He does not come after us. Why, if He is the Good Shepherd, does He not pursue His sheep? Why, if He is the Lord of all good gifts, does He not raise His hands to bless? Why, if He is the Lord of sinners, does He not bid us return to the foot of the Cross?

Oh! tell me, how can hands bless that are nailed fast? How can lips that are bruised and parched with desolation preach the tidings of Divine Love? How can feet that are dug with steel go after souls that are lost? They cannot. And if we are to undo the harm that we have done, we must make our way up the penitential slope of Calvary, up to the chalice of all common miseries, and cast ourselves at the foot of the Cross. We must kneel there at the foot of that Pulpit of Love and confess that when we stabbed His Heart it was our own we slew. But, oh, it is such a difficult thing to climb up the hill of Calvary. It is such a humiliating thing to be seen at the foot of the Cross. It is such a painful thing to be with one in pain and to be seen with one condemned by the world. It is such a hard thing to kneel at the foot of the Cross and admit that one is wrong. It is hard — *but it is harder to hang there!*

# Terms

## CROSS

Primarily the instrument of suffering on which Christ died and redeemed the world. It also stands for whatever pain or endurance that a Christian undergoes, and voluntarily accepts, in order to be joined with Christ and co-operate in the salvation of souls. The Cross is, therefore, a revealed mystery, taught by Christ when he said, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). The mystery of the Cross is one of the principal themes of St. Paul's writings (Romans 5:8; I Corinthians 1:17; Galatians 4:16; and Philippians 2:6-11).

## CRUCIFIX

A cross bearing the image of Christ. It must be placed on or over an altar where Mass is offered. Due reverence is always given to it. It is sometimes carried as a procession cross leading a line of clergy. Depicting the dead or suffering Christ, the crucifix did not come into general use until after the Reformation. The earlier ones represented Our Lord as the High Priest crowned, robed, and alive. Some men and women religious wear the crucifix as part of their habit. A crucifix is attached to the Rosary beads, and many liturgical blessings are to be given with it. A blessed crucifix is a sacramental and is commonly displayed in Catholic hospitals, homes, and institutions. (Etym. Latin *crucifixus*, the crucified.)

## SACRAMENTAL

Objects or actions that the Church uses after the manner of sacraments, in order to achieve through the merits of the faithful certain effects, mainly of a spiritual nature. They differ from sacraments in not having been instituted by Christ to produce their effect in virtue of the ritual performed. Their efficacy depends not on the rite itself, as in the sacraments, but on the influence of prayerful petition; that of the person who uses them and of the Church in approving their practice. The variety of sacramentals spans the whole range of times and places, words and actions, objects and gestures that, on the Church's authority, draw not only on the personal dispositions of the individuals but on the merits and prayers of the whole Mystical Body of Christ.

from Fr. John Hardon's *Modern Catholic Dictionary*

## FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS

On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (or Triumph of the Cross) we honor the Holy Cross by which Christ redeemed the world. The public veneration of the Cross of Christ originated in the fourth century, according to early accounts, beginning with the miraculous discovery of the cross on September 14, 326, by Saint Helen, mother of Constantine, while she was on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem -- the same day that two churches built at the site of Calvary by Constantine were dedicated.

The observance of the Feast of the Exaltation (probably from a Greek word meaning "bringing to light") of the Cross has been celebrated by Christians on September 14 ever since. In the Western Church, the feast came into prominence in the seventh century, apparently inspired by the recovery of a portion of the Cross, said to have been taken from Jerusalem the Persians, by the Roman emperor Heraclius in 629.

Christians "exalt" the Cross of Christ as the instrument of our salvation. Adoration of the Cross is, thus, adoration of Jesus Christ, the God Man, who suffered and died on this Roman instrument of torture for our redemption from sin and death. The cross represents the One Sacrifice by which Jesus, obedient even unto death, accomplished our salvation. The cross is a symbolic summary of the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ -- all in one image.

The Cross -- because of what it represents -- is the most potent and universal symbol of the Christian faith. It has inspired both liturgical and private devotions: for example, the Sign of the Cross, which is an invocation of the Holy Trinity; the "little" Sign of the Cross on head, lips and heart at the reading of the Gospel; praying the Stations (or Way) of the Cross; and the Veneration of the Cross by the faithful on Good Friday by kissing the feet of the image of Our Savior crucified.

Placing a crucifix (the cross with an image of Christ's body upon it) in churches and homes, in classrooms of Catholic schools and in other Catholic institutions, or wearing this image on our persons, is a constant reminder -- and witness -- of Christ's ultimate triumph, His victory over sin and death through His suffering and dying on the Cross.

We remember Our Lord's words, "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it." (Mt 10:38,39). Meditating on these words we unite ourselves -- our souls and bodies -- with His obedience and His sacrifice; and we rejoice in this inestimable gift through which we have the hope of salvation and the glory.

## Cross or Crucifix?

### Hope of the Human Race, Victory over Satan, Cleansing of Sin, the Open Door to Heaven

#### Answers to Protestant Objections To The Crucifix

By Mary Beth Kramski

It wasn't until I found myself wanting a crucifix that I felt force of Protestantism's opposition to this particular sign. It happened during my "homecoming" to the Catholic Church. I remember having the strange notion that it would require courage for me to be seen wearing a crucifix. Why? Because to most of my Protestant friends a crucifix was "a sign to be spoken against" (cf. Luke 2:34). It was seen as a Catholic symbol—bad enough in itself—that revealed Catholicism's lack of appreciation for the resurrection and its desire to "keep Jesus on the cross." The implication was that a real Christian doesn't wear a crucifix.

I'd gone along with the Protestant prohibition against crucifixes without giving it much thought. When it became an issue for me, I realized that was exactly the problem. Not only I, but, it seemed, the vast majority of Protestants hadn't given their objection to the crucifix much real thought. It was a part of Protestant culture that we accepted and handed on unquestioningly. Upon my return to the Catholic Church, I was struck by how far from the truth Protestant beliefs on this subject really are. Does the Catholic Church cling to the crucifix because it would rather avoid the resurrection? Consider this: My Protestant church celebrated Easter for one day. The Catholic Church celebrates Easter for 50 days—not including each Sunday of the year, which are seen as "little" Easters. The Mass never fails to proclaim the resurrection of Christ. And the Church's daily prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, is filled with Scripture and prayers rejoicing in the resurrection.

The idea that the Catholic Church downplays the resurrection is so obviously erroneous that anyone can unmask this misconception with only minor effort. But my fellow Protestants and I hadn't made that effort. Instead, we professed to know the answers before we asked the questions. Having discovered just how wrong we were, and as a result growing in my own appreciation of the crucifix, I couldn't help but wonder, "If Protestants understood the real reasons Catholics love the crucifix, if they could see what we see when we look at Jesus crucified, wouldn't they too come to love it?"

It's not surprising the crucifix offends many Protestants if they see it as an attempt to keep Jesus on the cross and to keep from Christians the benefits of the resurrection. But what they see when they look at a crucifix is not what I see, nor what Catholics through the centuries have seen. What I see is not a dead Jesus who offends me but a vivid reminder of the very essence of salvation—my own sinfulness that made such an extreme sacrifice necessary and the incomprehensible love of God incarnate laying down his life for me. In the crucifix, I see the hope of the human race, victory over Satan, the cleansing of sin, and the open door to heaven. I see a school of love, humility, forgiveness of our enemies, and all the other virtues. "Consider Jesus on the cross as you would a devout book worthy of your unceasing study and by which you may learn the practice of the most heroic virtues" (Dom Lorenzo Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, 155–156). When I look at Christ crucified, I don't see weakness and defeat but "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1: 23–24)—the holy wisdom of divine love. And I hear "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

The crucifix also tells us that suffering is not something to fear as though it could rob us of the fullness of Christian life. Because Jesus made suffering a servant in the cause of redemption, if received with faith, suffering can unite us to him in a way few things can. Only Jesus crucified can make sense of and give purpose to human suffering. And what does it stir in a heart that loves Jesus to look upon the crucifix? Faith and confidence to trust in such a God as this. Hope—in the knowledge that salvation is firmly founded on this one perfect sacrifice. And love—a desire to return love for love. Giorgio Tiepolo writes, "Anyone who does not fall in love with God by looking at Jesus dead upon the cross will never fall in love" (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 11).

And love refuses to forget the suffering of the Beloved. Why would we want to dismiss from our minds what he went through for us? We memorialize the sacrifice of our war veterans. And Holocaust survivors implore us to "never forget." Why? Because love remembers. Does focusing on the crucifix cause the resurrection to slip from view? On the contrary, it brings to mind the great gift that the slain Lamb of God gained for all who believe—life everlasting. We fall victim to a false dichotomy if we think the crucifix is an offense to the resurrected Lord. The Catholic Church teaches that the crucifixion and resurrection are part of one whole: the paschal mystery.

When we look at a crucifix, it is never without the awareness that Christ's suffering ended in the victory of the resurrection. And when we rejoice in the resurrection, we are to be always mindful of the fact that it sprang from the perfect sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary. The Catholic Church is in love with all of Christ's life. Depictions of its stages can be found in her art and churches. Nothing in the life of Christ is thought to be insignificant. What sense, then, would it make to exclude representations of the central mystery of the crucified Lamb?

There's more, however, to Protestantism's aversion to the crucifix than misconceptions about why Catholics love it. Although not explicitly stated as a tenet of faith, in many Protestant denominations the work and suffering of the crucifixion are seen as being fixed in the past. Now is the time to reap the fruits—salvation, healing, deliverance. The suffering is over; the work is done. (The "health and wealth" teachers take this idea to the extreme. No suffering for us—just the perks.)

A plain cross, as opposed to a crucifix, serves this theology nicely. It can indicate the source of salvation without too vivid a reminder of the actual suffering involved—the wounds, the blood, the death. Now, I'm not opposed to the plain cross. It's a beautiful symbol, but not to the exclusion of the crucifix. Error results whenever we cling so tightly to one aspect of the truth that we can't open our hands—or our minds—to receive its fullness. Yes, the crucifixion is past in history, but it's not just a historical event. Yes, Jesus' work on the cross is "finished," as he said, but that does not preclude our participation in his work.

The idea that Jesus suffered so we don't have to is not biblical. Peter says, "For to this [suffering] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). And our Lord himself tells us, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). Not only are we called to suffer like Jesus, i.e., in imitation of him, but we are called to suffer *with* Jesus, to participate in the one redeeming sacrifice of Calvary.

Scripture leaves no doubt of this:

"The cup that I drink you will drink," says our Lord (Mark 10:39), referring to his passion and death. "Rejoice in so far as you share in the sufferings of Christ that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Ptr. 4:13). "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). "I have suffered the loss of all things . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:8, 10–11). "[We are] fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17). Then there's this clincher: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, *and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ* for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col. 1:24, emphasis added). Notice the vital connection between our personal participation in the sufferings of Christ and reaping the fruits of those sufferings—i.e., grace for other members of the body, glory, resurrection, the inheritance of Christ.

But, we may ask, how can this be? The crucifixion took place almost 2,000 years ago—can we go back in time? If Jesus finished the work of redemption on the cross, what's left to be done? The temporal factor, of course, isn't a problem for God, who operates outside time. It's true that the crucifixion happened at a particular point in earthly history, and Jesus doesn't relive it over and over again. But it is, so to speak, "preserved" in eternity, ever present to the Eternal One. In addition, the actions of Christ, because he is infinite God, reverberate through the centuries, and are, in a sense, ever-living.

That leads to the second question: What need is there for me to share in the crucifixion? What could possibly be "lacking" in the finished work of Christ? In Jesus, who is the head of the body of Christ, nothing is lacking. His work is perfect. What remains to be done is for this perfect work to be "distributed" to each of the members of his body throughout time. After all, how can we claim to share the mission of Jesus if we take no part in his most important work—the work of redemption accomplished on the cross? And how can we be one with his heart if the idea of suffering for the sake of others is foreign to us?

If the suffering and work of Calvary are, as some Protestants claim, past history, leaving nothing for us to do, then maybe using only a plain cross might make sense—maybe. But when we know that Jesus is inviting each of us to join him at Calvary, the value of the crucifix in helping us respond to him becomes obvious. This call to suffer with Christ is an invitation to transforming love. Through the experience of the cross, we touch the inner heart of God. The saints tell us that's where joy and power reside.

In spite of many Protestant misconceptions regarding Catholics and the crucifix, I remain hopeful that their objection to this symbol may someday be overcome, that—even if never embraced as fully as among Catholics—the crucifix may find a meaningful place in those Protestant faiths that oppose it. There's evidence to suggest we're not as far apart on this issue as it might seem.

Without thinking of it as such, Protestants have already been making use of the crucifix in a variety of ways. Films produced by Protestants contain scenes of the crucifixion more vivid than any crucifix. On the back cover of a magazine published by a prominent Baptist minister, a painting of the crucifixion was displayed.

Then there was the night I attended a dinner at an Evangelical church. The guest speaker was illustrating her points with overhead transparencies. At the end, she began to give the usual invitation to accept Christ as Savior. Just then, I looked up and there it was, projected front and center: a crucifix. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14–15).

Just as Moses knew that for healing to occur, the people needed to see not just a plain pole but the serpent on the pole, so too it seemed our speaker instinctively knew that, in order to grasp the message of salvation, the people needed to see not just a plain cross but the lamb slain upon the cross. They needed to see a crucifix.

## Sacred Scripture: The Cross

1 Corinthians 1:17-18: For Christ sent me not to baptize; but to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of speech, lest the cross of Christ should be made void. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:22-25: For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

2 Corinthians 13:3-4: He is not weak toward you but powerful in you. 4 For indeed he was crucified out of weakness, but he lives by the power of God. So also we are weak in him, but toward you we shall live with him by the power of God. He is not weak toward you but powerful in you. 4 For indeed he was crucified out of weakness, but he lives by the power of God. So also we are weak in him, but toward you we shall live with him by the power of God.

1 Peter 2:24-25: He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Colossians 1:19-21: For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven. And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through his death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before him,<sup>23</sup> provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, am a minister.

Galatians 2:19: With Christ I am nailed to the cross.

Ephesians 2:14-16: For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, <sup>15</sup> abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it.

Philippians 3:18: For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Colossians 2:14: Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross

Galatians 6:12-14: It is those who want to make a good appearance in the flesh who are trying to compel you to have yourselves circumcised, only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Not even those having themselves circumcised observe the law themselves; they only want you to be circumcised so that they may boast of your flesh. <sup>14</sup> But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

*Philippians 2:5-11:* Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hebrews 12:2: For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.<sup>3</sup> Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

Luke 9:23: Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Luke 14:27: Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Acts 2:36: Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Galations 2:26: For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.

Galations 5:24: Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.

Matthew 28:5-6: Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.

Romans 6:6-11: We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as (being) dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

### **Readings: The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (The Triumph of the Cross)**

#### **First Reading: Numbers 21: 4b-9**

The people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 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.

#### **Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11**

Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### **Gospel Reading: John 3:13-17**

No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

## Sacred Scripture: The Crucifixion

John 19:16-29: Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews." Now many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that he said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, "Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be," in order that the passage of scripture might be fulfilled (that says): "They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots." This is what the soldiers did. Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

Luke 23:26-42: 26 As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. 28 Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, 29 for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' 30 At that time people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' 31 for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?" 32 Now two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. 34 (Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.") They divided his garments by casting lots. 35 The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God." 36 Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine 37 they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." 38 Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." 39 Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." 40 The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? 41 And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Mark 15:21-32: 21 They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. 22 They brought him to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull). 23 They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them to see what each should take. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27 With him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left. 28 ) 29 Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself by coming down from the cross." 31 Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes, mocked him among themselves and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him.

Matthew 27:32-44: As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull), 34 they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink. 35 After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots; 36 then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. 38 Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. 39 Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, (and) come down from the cross!" 41 Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way.

## On “The Cross”

*We adore You, O Christ, and praise You, Because by Your Holy Cross You have re-deemed the world.*

— **The Way of the Cross** —

*Dying, you destroyed our death; rising you restored our life.  
Save us by your cross, Christ our Redeemer.*

— **Antiphon for Afternoon prayer** —

*My book will be the Crucifix. I will always keep it before my eyes to learn how to love and to suffer.*

— **St. Francis Xavier Cabrini** —

*Whoever does not seek the cross of Christ doesn't seek the glory of Christ.*

— **St. John of the Cross** —

*If one does away with the fact of the Resurrection, one also does away with the Cross, for both stand and fall together, and one would then have to find a new center for the whole message of the gospel.*

— **Hans Urs von Balthasar** —

## *O Crux, ave spes unica! Hail, O Cross, our only hope!*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we are invited to look upon the Cross. It is the “privileged place” where the love of God is revealed and shown to us.... On the Cross human misery and divine mercy meet. The adoration of this unlimited mercy is for man the only way to open himself to the mystery which the Cross reveals.

The Cross is planted in the earth and would seem to extend its roots in human malice, but it reaches up, pointing as it were to the heavens, pointing to the goodness of God. By means of the Cross of Christ, the Evil One has been defeated, death is overcome, life is given to us, hope is restored, light is imparted. *O Crux, ave spes unica! ...*

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15), says Jesus. What do we see then when we bring our eyes to bear on the cross where Jesus was nailed (cf. John 19:37)? We contemplate the sign of God’s infinite love for humanity.

*O Crux, ave spes unica!* Saint Paul speaks of the same theme in the letter to the Ephesians.... Not only did Christ Jesus become man, in everything similar to human beings, but He took on the condition of a servant and humbled Himself even more by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (cf. Philippians 2:6-8).

Yes, “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son” (John 3:16). We admire — overwhelmed and gratified — the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge (cf. Ephesians 3:18-19)! *O Crux, ave spes unica! ...*

Through the mystery of your Cross and your Resurrection, save us O Lord! Amen.

— Pope John Paul II -- Excerpts from homily September 14, 2003

## History and Culture

### How old is the sign of the Cross?

The earliest Father's of the Church mention this custom, and say it originated with the apostles. St. Nicephorus informs us that St. John the Apostle signed himself with the sign of the Cross; Tertullian (AD 160) urges the Christians to make the sign of the Cross when coming in and going out, when dressing, at table, in their rooms, when sitting down, and before every undertaking. St. Ephrem (AD 378) writes: "Arm thyself with the sign of the Cross as with a shield, sign all thy members and thy heart, but sign thyself not only with thy hand, but with thy mind. Thy work, thy coming in and thy going out, thy bed, and the ground over which thou dost pass, sign every thing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; for these are the strongest weapons."

*From Fr. Leonard Goffine's the Church's Year*

### "In this sign conquer" - Saint Helena and Emperor Constantine

When the Emperor Constantine, had conquered his enemy, the cruel Maxentius, by the aid of the holy Cross which he saw in the heavens, radiant and glorious, with the inscription: "In this sign Conquer" he became animated with such veneration for the Cross, that he commanded it to be venerated throughout the Roman Empire, and from that time forward forbade any one to be crucified. He also resolved to build a magnificent church in Jerusalem in honor of the Holy Cross. His mother, the Empress Helena, in her very advanced age went herself to the Holy Land, and undertook, with the aid of St. Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, to find the sacred burial-place of Christ.

*From Fr. Leonard Goffine's the Church's Year*

Emperor Constantine won victor in war through the sign of the Cross which appeared in the sky along with a voice that promised victor through the sign of the Cross. We are fighting each day a war against the devil, the flesh and the world and we can conquer only through the sign of the Cross. St. Anthony of the desert tells us that each time the sign of the Cross is made the devil flees. This is why we begin all things in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The sign of the Cross is a sign in that it is a profession of Faith. To make the sign is an outward sign of a profession of our belief in the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord through which we are saved. To make the sign of the Cross is also a prayer, one of the shortest prayers of our faith and it is the first prayer listed in most catechisms and prayer books. Through this prayer we admit our humanity and weakness saying to all that it is only in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that I can think, speak and do anything at all. It is a complete giving of self (intellect and will) over to the Trinity, it is saying not in my name but in Your Name, not my will but Your Will.

### Woman from Albania

During the communist occupation of Albania in the early to mid 1900's, the communist government forbid people to wear or have crucifixes. There was an older woman, whose house was searched by the communist guards. The guards knew the woman was Catholic and searched her house with out giving the woman notice. The guards found no crucifixes in the house. The woman taunted the guards by saying that she did have a crucifix in the house but that no matter how long the searched the would never find it. The guards searched more, tearing the woman's home apart in search of the forbidden crucifix. Finally, the guards, not finding the crucifix verbally and physically abused the woman trying to pressure her into telling them where the crucifix was. She remained silent, stared at the guards and said, "Do you want to know where my crucifix is?" Then she simply made the sign of the Cross. This woman as we all do carries the crucifix with her daily by living the Faith and if necessary, being willing to die for the Faith.

### Prayer in front of the Crucifix (Saint Augustine)

Behold, O kind and most sweet Jesus, I cast myself on my knees in Thy sight, and with the most fervent desire of my soul I pray and beseech Thee that Thou wouldst impress upon my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, with true repentance for my sins, and a firm desire of amendment whilst with deep affection and grief of soul I ponder within myself, and mentally contemplate Thy five precious wounds: having before my eyes that which David spoke in prophecy: "They pierced my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones."

## Some Thoughts...

### 1. Short Story of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Pick 10 people. 8 should be randomly picked, one person will be St. Maximilian Kolbe and one will be the prisoner that was going to be put to death. The quick story is this. St. Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Priest that was sentenced to the concentration camp (Hitler killed 1 million Polish Catholic, mostly priests and religious). A prisoner tried to escape from St. Maximilian's dorm but was caught. To punish the person the Nazis choose to send 10 prisoners from that dorm to the starvation cell, all 10 in the same cell. The Nazi guards called the men by name (or number) and they each stood up. One man when he was called began to cry and beg that he not be killed, that he had a wife and children. St. Maximilian moved with compassion stood up quietly and then said, "I will take that man's place." The guard said to him, "Who are you?" Kolbe replied, "I am a Catholic Priest." St. Maximilian Kolbe shown the perfect example of Christ on the Cross, there is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend. This short of St. Maximilian can be semi-acted out, the 8 people are just there for effect, Maximilian Kolbe, the prisoner and the guard would need to be planned and scripted.

### 2. The Sacrifice of Calvary in movies

All the really good movies are good because they have Sacrifice. The hero or even sometimes the villain imitates Christ giving up their life. List as many movies as possible where this is the case.

### 3. Participation in the Cross

Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering. Jesus chooses and desires that we associate and participate in the CROSS. Here are two analogies. Think of a football game, the team wins, who participates more in the victory the fan or the player. Think of war, who participates more in the battle the country or the soldier. We are not just the people Jesus died for, we are not just those looking up at the Crucifixion, we are expected to also be the crucified. We are the Body of Christ and we must ask ourselves, what happen to the physical body of Christ, it suffered and was crucified, we to must participate in the suffering and the crucifixion.

### 4. Most recognized symbols

The Cross would have to be in the top 3 most recognized symbols. In small groups everyone could write down their own top 3 and then a tally can be made and even presented in the large at the end. It would be important to ask not what their top 3 are but what they think the top 3 in the world are. The Crucifix around someone's neck is kind of an odd symbol. Crucifixion was a state mandated form of capital punishment for over 300 years in the Roman Empire, it would be like an American walking around with a electric chair necklace. Some people could think this about Catholics. Why do we wear crucifixes and hang them in our homes.

### 5. Why did Christ Suffer?

The usual answer is that Christ suffered so that I wouldn't have to. WRONG and RIGHT. This answer is right in that Christ suffered so that we would not have to suffer the eternal punishment of hell (complete separation from God). This answer is wrong if we think we do not have to suffer in fact, Christ suffered so that I would know how to suffer, so that I would know the meaning of suffering, so that I could participate in the redemptive nature of suffering.

### 6. Money in the Bank

Christ said it is finished, but yet St. Paul says that we complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. It is finished but not finished. Think of it this way. There is debt that each person has, some more, some less. Christ know the exact amount of each one of our debt and he pays that debt on the Cross and through his Passion, Death and Resurrection makes a deposit of GRACE on the Cross that can pay ALL of our debt. The deposit is made, it is finished. What is lacking is the withdraw. We must come to the Cross, embrace the Cross, pick up our Cross, participate in the Cross and thus withdraw what has been given freely to us.

## Small Group Format

### **Lesson Emphasis:**

- A) The Cross of Christ—An Expression of Love, Embrace of Suffering, Gift of Hope, Weapon Defeating Evil
- B) The Crucifix—The Image of Salvation
- C) The “Crosses” We Bear

\*\* Large Group Lecture will cover “Main Points” 1-3 \*\*

### **Sample Structure:**

### **Discussion Questions**

#### **A) : Personal Reflection on Large Group:**

What does Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross tell us about God? Love? Suffering?

What does it mean to you personally? For your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Reflect on the following: “On the Cross human misery and divine mercy meet.” (Pope John Paul II)

*Optional Apologetics:*

*Respond to the following argument: A good God would not allow suffering in the world. Humans suffer. Therefore, God does not exist.*

#### **B) : The Crucifix**

What do you think/feel when you see a crucifix?

As Catholics, we venerate Jesus on the cross. What does it mean to venerate?

St. Francis Xavier Cabrini said, “My book will be the Crucifix. I will always keep it before my eyes to learn how to love and to suffer.”

#### **Apologetics:**

What is the difference between a cross and a crucifix?

Some feel that the use of a crucifix instead of a cross shows a lack of “appreciation for the Resurrection” and a desire to “keep Jesus on the cross.” Others feel that it places too much emphasis on suffering or that the Passion of Christ is a thing of the past. How would you respond to these?

(brief sample answer to claim 1: “Jesus did not redeem us on Easter Sunday. He redeemed us on the cross on Good Friday. He also said that to be his disciple we must deny ourselves, took up our cross, and follow him. Nowhere in Scripture do we find him replacing such attention with Easter Sunday. To behold the image of Jesus hanging on the cross is to recognize the greatest event in history.” - Father Vincent Serpa)

**C) : Our “Cross”**

What are some crosses we as Christians bear?

How can we carry our crosses in imitation of Christ? How can we help others with their crosses like Simon helped Jesus?

Optional Apologetics:

*It can be easy to feel sometimes like God is too demanding, like he expects too much of us instead of being a generous and loving God. How would you counsel a friend who was feeling this way?*

**Small Group Activities:**

**Choose one or more of the following:**

1. Venerate the Crucifix (using a “Prayer before a Crucifix,” private prayer, etc)
2. Spread out the Stations of the Cross without their numbers and see if the group can put them in order and then have youth choose their favorite Station and explain why.
3. Recite a decade from the Rosary (Carrying of the Cross, the Crucifixion)
4. Group prayer: Sharing personal crosses, prayer for one another
5. Mediate on Phil 2:6-11, John 3:16, or some other passage from Sacred Scripture
6. See number 2 on page 17
7. See number 4 on page 17