

WHY IS THE CROSS A PLACE OF VICTORY?

“ Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,
and not with the wisdom of human eloquence,
so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.
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.
For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the learning of the learned I will set aside."
Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe?
Where is the debater of this age?
Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish?”
(1 Cor: 1-17-20)

The Sign of the Cross

We are used to making the sign of the cross that often we go through it without reflecting on its meaning. But when symbols are stripped of their meaning, they become mere trappings that have no power to affect our lives.

The Wisdom of the Cross

To make the sign of the cross is to profess a commitment to live a “cruciform existence,” that is, to let one’s life be moulded according to the form of the cross of Christ. That idea will sound masochistic to a mind shaped by the world’s values and sees the cross solely as an emblem of pain and suffering.

But the cross, as Paul himself discovers, is also the place of victory.

Thus, to commit oneself to a cruciform existence is to participate in the victory of Christ. Participation in that victory does not mean that pains and sufferings are eradicated. No! Rather, they are accepted as necessary ingredients of victory.

The paradox of the cross is that weakness is turned into an immense source of power. The cross, when embraced by Christ, became God’s means of subverting the world’s values and thwarting its expectations.

How does Paul discover this wisdom of the cross?

Paul, the Pharisee and persecutor of the followers of ‘the Way’ thought that Jesus was a counterfeit Messiah, whose false claims brought him to the kind of shameful and scandalous death that he deserved. But when he met the risen and glorious Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul realized how misguided had been his zeal to stamp out this growing Messianic movement. He understood that God had raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

The Cross, a Place of Victory

For a Pharisee, who firmly believed in the resurrection of the dead, this was a sign that the eschatological age-to-come has dawned upon his generation. Paul saw the Christ event as the awaited apocalyptic intervention of God in human history. The cross which looked like a symbol of shame and defeat was, in fact, the place of victory-the victory of a dual fidelity:

1. God’s fidelity to his promises, that could not be thwarted by Israel’s infidelity;
2. Christ fidelity to his mission to reconcile the world with God, even at the cost of his own life.

The worldly minded is wrong to think that every kind of pain and suffering equals the cross. No! Many of the sufferings that people endure are the result of deliberate wrong choices and human sinfulness.

In Pauline vocabulary, this is referred to as the “wrath of God,” which does not imply a capricious activity or vindictive emotion on the part of God. Rather, Paul uses this standard apocalyptic term to explain how God allows sin to work its course because of his respect for human freedom. Human sinfulness thus brings about its own punishment, which is experienced as a form of pain and suffering. This is not a “cross”, in the Christian sense, since, being a result of sin; it is not conformed to the cross of Christ. Three distinctive marks can help us identify whether what we suffer is conformed or not to the cross of Christ:

1. It is a suffering endured for the sake of others;
2. It is a suffering due to fidelity to one’s commitment, mission or vocation, whatever one’s state of life may be;
3. It is a necessary suffering.

Where there is effort to remain faithful to one’s commitment and fundamental option in life, where there is suffering endured for the sake of another, where there is willingness to embrace hardships, then one becomes a participant in the victory of the cross and reflects in one’s life the paradox of “power in weakness.”