

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



This past Thursday, September 14th, we celebrated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Many of the faithful in the Archdiocese gathered at the Cathedral Basilica in Newark, to celebrate Mass with Cardinal Tobin to mark his having received the Pallium from Pope Francis. The Pallium is the lambs wool collar which signifies the Good Shepherd, who embraces the Cross in looking for the Lost Sheep. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross is central to our Catholic Christian belief, it is worthwhile reminding myself, and those of us who were unable to attend Mass that day, of what this Feast means.

All of us have a cross in our life. Our crosses can take many forms. The cross is always something tangible, specific. It may be something that happened twenty-five years ago, it may be an aspect of our personality, it may be a person we live with, it may be a sickness, it may be an injustice, it may be a situation in work, it may be the death of a loved one.

The cross is the instrument which the Enemy of our soul, the deceiver, the father of lies, uses to make us doubt God's love for us. He shows us our cross and says *'You see, if God is so good, explain this to me! Why would God allow this to happen to you? You know why? Because deep down he does not love you. If you were God, you would do a much better job. To hell with religion, the church, the priests, all this is nonsense, take your life in your own hands and fix it, because only you are able to.'* Well, in those or similar words.

The cross is always an experience of limitation, it is humbling. Eve had a cross in the Garden of Eden. God had placed her in Paradise, giving everything to her, with the exception of one fruit. She fixates on this, and cannot accept that she cannot have it. She believes the lie: *'you cannot have it, you cannot do what you want, your life is not the way you want, because God is mean, he is jealous of you.'* She believes this lie and falls. Sin is always a result of rejecting the cross in our life.

The only one who has not doubted the love of God when confronted with the cross is Jesus Christ. He experienced all that we do, and when faced with the cross he cried out in our humanity *"Eli, Eli, Lama Sabbachtani – My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* To feel forsaken, cut off, abandoned, deprived of the face of God – this is the experience of Hell itself, it is the most terrible anguish a person can experience. Jesus Christ experienced this, he accepted it. We profess in the Creed *'He descended into Hell'* and yet he did not doubt God's love.

He embraced the cross, saying *'Even if I do not understand why this is happening, even if I do not see the meaning of this now, I know that you, my God, are love, that you love me, and that you will not abandon me to death.'* The cross is the place where he meets the love of God.

What Jesus experienced in his flesh, we also experience Sacramentally in the liturgy. In God's own way, and in his own time, the Crosses in our life can become enlightened, and we begin to understand why they are there. When you think about it, God has always waited for us at a crossroads in our life. In front of the cross, we either throw everything out of the window, or transcend our selves through the grace of Christ and experience the love of God in that very circumstance.

Why is there such a mess in the world with terrorism? People who are burning with hatred and anger? So angry, so misguided, that 16 years ago they hijacked airplanes and flew them in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing three thousand innocent people. So angry, so deluded, that they drive vans over pedestrians, murdering men, women and children in London and Barcelona. What could drive a person to do such a thing? The terrorists, all of them, without a doubt, have experienced some form of perceived injustice; they have been wronged by someone, or experienced some humiliation, either in their childhood or as adults. But for sure their cross has not been enlightened. The result being that they become justice makers, they take matters into their own hands, they take the place of God himself, and begin to fix things the way they see fit.

The Holy Humility of Christ! He could have called down a legion of angels to wipe out his enemies, those who were mistreating him, but he did not do so. He embraces the cross, not out of stoicism, or resignation, but really believing that God the Father loves him, and that he allows the cross as a means, the only means, to experience that love. May the cross which you and I have today be enlightened, may our crosses be, in virtue of Christ, an occasion for us to experience the immense love which God has for us.

Fr. Sean