

Homily for Holy Cross Day

Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

A couple of years back, during the Easter season, one of Toronto's major newspapers published an article, about the direction of the current jewellery trend. The article asked the question, "Which cross is your style?"

Diamond crusted crosses, gold plated crosses, large iced crosses, small expensive crosses; some worn by the current musical sensation, others worn by the rich and famous, with the article asking the question again and again, "Which cross is your style?"

The article was indicative of the society and culture we find ourselves in modern day North America; a place of increasing self centeredness and self focus, where the cost of what I wear, defines who I am, for it is how much of the world values me.

Whether it is the clothes on our backs, the cars which we drive, or even the houses which we can afford, so many of these things intended to keep us warm, get us around, and shelter us from the cold, are now glaring status symbols, in a culture which values them so much. But the question begs to be asked, can the cross really be a symbol of individualistic expression, or a symbol of status for all to see?

The cross is most certainly the central symbol of the Christian faith; recognized almost anywhere in the world. Its recognition *can* spawn negativity for some, and offer redemption for others, but like it or not, this first century tool, of human destruction, is clearly the most identifiable representation of our faith.

I had a kid in my junior youth group last year, who liked to ask me questions, which he thought I couldn't answer. One Friday night last

spring, he asked me if the cross I wore around my neck was the same thing as someone who might wear an electric chair in its place. However smugly, he essentially was asking me why I would hang, an instrument of death, around my neck.

You see, for many of us who have grown up in the Christian faith, we find comfort in the crosses carried close to our hearts, and assurance in the crosses which hang positioned on a common wall. It reminds us of a God who offers undying love, and ever-present care; it reminds us of a saviour who died for sins. But sometimes I think we forget the brutality from where it came; sometimes I think we forget the cruelty by which men were nailed to it.

In the two thousand years which have passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the symbol of the cross has transformed from an instrument of torture and cruel death, to a mark of comfort and care. This transformation has been a monumental one, and integral to the development of our faith, but in all our focus on resurrection and new life, have we forgotten the *scandal* associated with Christ's cross.

An innocent man forced to die for crimes which he did not commit, beaten and nailed to tree. Our saviour, their leader, our messiah, their friend, was persecuted, made to suffer, and put to death. The scandal, in which the cross proclaims, should be as potent, as any, we can imagine; love, death, betrayal, and scandal, much more than a simple cross to revere.

There may be some who think that this Day of Holy Cross, is a strange day for a baptism; in fact, so did I, when I first looked for a feast day to baptize young Spencer. But the more I prayed about it, and the more I thought about, there aren't many better feast days which we could pick, for it is by the cross which we remember, our life in a risen Christ.

In our Anglican tradition, during the celebration of the Eucharist, we emphasize the words, "...in remembrance of me." The gift of memory is one that Christianity has long understood and worked to preserve. However, while memory is often seen as a looking back into the past to completed events, we as Christians acknowledge a 'corporate memory,' one that lives out the memories of the past, through rituals in the present, that we might understand our future.

Without such a memory, there can be no forgiveness, no healing of the hurts and pains of the past. And forgiveness and healing are so central to our Christian existence.

The trouble is, our memory is often blocked. Past hurts and sufferings are too painful to remember, so we blot them out of consciousness. We say 'live for the present,' while doing so can be an evasion of the reality of our past. It is the evasion of this past that *must* be undermined and left behind – for to live within a community of faith, is to live within a community that remembers.¹

When we are plunged into the waters of baptism, we experience and live out Christ's death upon the cross. We are then called from the depths of those same waters of death, to rise with Him in new life. It is that 'corporate memory' which plays such an integral role in baptism. Together, remembering the scandal of the cross. Together, remembering the suffering of Christ's death. Together, remembering His rising in to new life, and together, through the waters of baptism, anointing a new vessel of remembrance.

It is true, that the Cross alone is no different than an image of the Electric Chair, and no matter how many diamonds one encrusts upon a cross it becomes no more valuable than before. It is by faith that the Cross of Christ finds triumph, by faith that it is no longer just

¹ We Preach Christ Crucified, Kenneth Leech

some tree. It reminds us that death is no longer the end, and that suffering shall not endure.

For, without the suffering there would be no healing today, and without the death there could be no new life. It was in the face of cruelty and the worst humanity had to offer, our God looked past the pain of death. By Cross of Christ, we are reminded, as our liturgy also does, that betrayed and forsaken Christ did not fight back, but overcome hatred with love.

So as we stand together this morning, to welcome the newly baptized; let us remember the death we were each baptized into, and the new life we arose to live. Let us lift high the cross, let us proclaim Christ crucified, for our God has triumphed over death.

Thanks be to God.