



Life in Christ is a call to ‘heroic, self-sacrificing love’

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Cardinal Augustine Meyer once wrote that, “Nothing great is ever achieved without suffering.”

His words come back to me every year during Holy Week. They remind us that discipleship always has a cost. No Christian ever lives the Gospel without eventually encountering the cross. During the Triduum — Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday —the Church invites us to remember that sin is real and that only blood can redeem it . . . but also that God loves us so deeply that He sent His only son to offer Himself for our deliverance.

In giving His life for us, Jesus asks us to live our lives for others. He asks us to share in His work of redemption. That’s why the Gospel is never merely a call to be “nice” to others. There’s nothing sweet about Golgotha. Life in Jesus Christ is a call to heroic and self-sacrificing love. If we want to rise with Jesus on Easter, we also have to share His work of salvation on Good Friday.

C.S. Lewis captured this basic Christian understanding very clearly when he wrote that, “Christianity is a thing of unspeakable joy. But it begins not in joy, but in wretchedness, and it does no good to try to get to the joy by bypassing the wretchedness.”

Of course, the nature of everyday America in 2001 is that we all live our lives in routines — routines that tend to dull us into self-absorption at work, at play, in our families, and also in our religious faith. Even the broken body of Christ on the cross can become a standard piety, an object of devotion that doesn’t really touch our hearts. That’s why these days of Holy Week are so vital. Holy Week is the most sacred time of the year. It’s a time to wake up from our routines and shake off the distractions of daily life — and to concentrate on the One in whom we anchor our hope.

This year, listen to the Word of God with new ears. Make some personal room for silence this week. Read and pray over the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion. Venerate the cross. Remember the price paid for your redemption. Understand how zealously God loves you . . . and when you do, you’ll begin understand the meaning of the Gospel and the urgency of your own vocation to bring the fruit of God’s love — new life in Jesus Christ — to others.

Good Friday is an end: an end to death; an end to our old selves and our old selfishness. Easter Sunday is a beginning, the beginning, of a new and “unspeakable joy” for each of us and all of us. The sorrow of Holy Week is the doorway to something infinitely more beautiful.

So may God grant you and your family, and all of us, a blessed Holy Week — and a holy and joy-filled Easter!

Your brother in Christ,

+ Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.