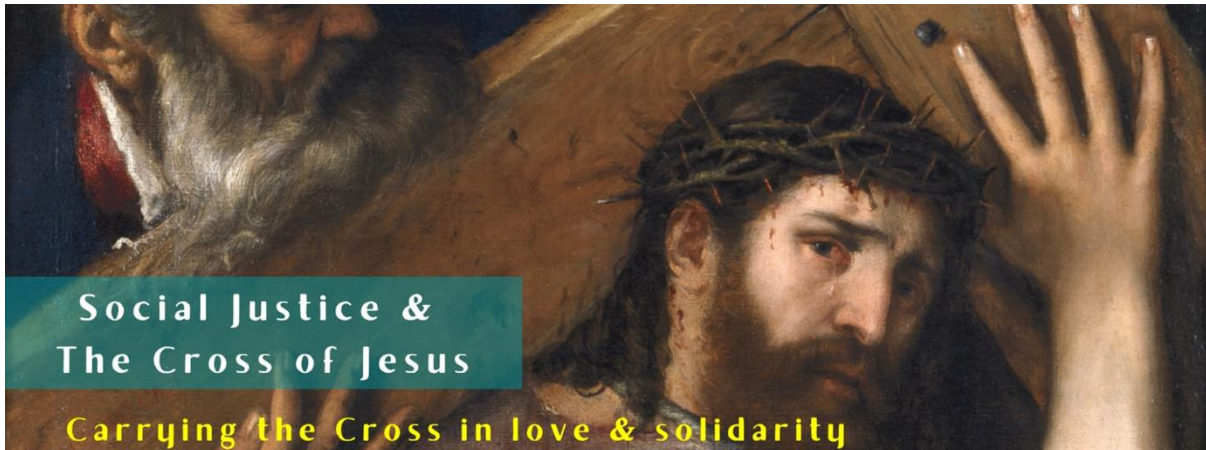


SOCIAL JUSTICE & THE CROSS OF JESUS
REFLECTION 4 – CARRYING THE CROSS IN LOVE & SOLIDARITY



Christ Carrying the Cross | Titian

THE JOURNEY WITH THE CROSS

Do we ever get down by what people say about us?

Perhaps so far down that we do not know how to get up again.

That sense of being trapped by our grieving.

Of being in a rut, where the world seems so gloomy?

SAINT TERESA OF ÁVILA

As we journey with the Cross over these weeks, we listen to a quote from *Saint Teresa of Ávila*, who offers helpful spiritual advice.

“These souls, for the most part, grieve over anything said against them.

They do not embrace the cross but drag it along, and so it hurts and wearies them and breaks them to pieces.

However, if the cross is loved, it is easy to bear; this is certain.”

(Meditations on the Song of Songs 1566. Chapter Two. Paragraph 26)



Saint Teresa of Ávila by Peter Paul Rubens

Dragging the Cross takes much more out of us.

But Jesus did not tell us to drag the cross along life’s journey.

He invited us to take up the cross and follow.

Let us pause and reflect on the challenge and encouragement of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel.

“Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’” 16:24

Jesus invites us to take up our cross. He does not say to drag it.

SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING | SOLIDARITY

In our Social Justice Teaching, we speak of *solidarity*.

Three such examples in Matthew's Gospel are

- the disciples wait with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
- and where Simon helps Jesus carry his cross.
- Peter denying Jesus, yet there was still hope for him.

Sometimes we are invited by Jesus to help carry the cross. The cross may not even be made of wood, but may be another aspect of the deep suffering of Jesus. It may be our presence, being there for someone in great need.

FIRST EXAMPLE - THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

The invitation to Peter, James and John, was to be present and stay awake in solidarity, during the grieving and agitation that Jesus experienced before his arrest. To be close by and in prayer for Jesus, while still giving Jesus his space.

Jesus instructed the disciples ***'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'*** 26:36

This was the larger group in solidarity.

Within that group, Jesus selects three to be closer physically and said to them

'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' 26:38

Jesus moved a short distance and

"threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.'" 26:39

Three times Jesus returned and found them asleep.

SECOND EXAMPLE – PLACED TO HELP JESUS CARRY HIS CROSS.

Perhaps we didn't volunteer to help someone carry their cross, but found ourselves in that situation.

Do we begrudgingly help, or do we embrace that person and their cross?

Matthew's Gospel tells us in chapter 27

"As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross." 27:32

And we ponder how that experience could have changed *Simon of Cyrene*.

THIRD EXAMPLE – PETER DENYING JESUS, YET THERE WAS STILL HOPE.

Sometimes we are not certain about the cross.

We find ourselves checking it out, but not making any commitment.

We remember Peter who followed Jesus on the night of his arrest, yet denied that he knew him, not once, but three times.

But Peter's denial was even more pronounced.

At the Last Supper, Peter promised Jesus twice, that he would never desert him. A promise of solidarity with Jesus was made twice, yet he would deny Jesus three times.

"Peter said to him, 'Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.'

Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.'

Peter said to him, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' "26:33-35

Is there any hope for Peter?

After the third denial, knowing he had failed Jesus, the story continues

"At that moment the cock crowed.

Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said:

'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.'

And he went out and wept bitterly. "26:74-75

After Jesus rises from the dead, and appeared to Mary of Magdala, and the other Mary, the two of them were sent to share the Good News, that Jesus is risen and that he wished to meet the Eleven in Galilee.

On a mountain in Galilee, Jesus commissioned the disciples to baptize and teach.

The very last words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel were

'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' 28:20

We are never alone. Jesus is always with us.

We can never carry our cross alone. Jesus is always with us.

Even when we mess up, there is hope.

Peter, after failing Jesus in an act of solidarity, went on after the Resurrection, to three decades of sharing the Good News, in solidarity with Holy Spirit and the evolving early Church.

***Do we resemble Peter, James and John, falling asleep, at a time when we are really needed?
[pause, pray and reflect]***

If we are pressed into solidarity like Simon of Cyrene, are we able to embrace the opportunity to love?

[pause, pray and reflect]

When we fail to live out our promise to Jesus and to others, as Peter did, do we deny our faults or do we make amends?

[pause, pray and reflect]

HOPE IN JESUS

There is always hope. That hope is found in Jesus.
Jesus is faithful in his promise to be with us always.
The reality is that we cannot do it alone.
Jesus invites us to come to him and he will show us the way.

In Matthew 11, Jesus offers us that hope.

*'Come to me, all you that are weary
and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.*

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' 11:28-30

Or as *Saint Teresa of Ávila* shared,

"However, if the cross is loved, it is easy to bear; this is certain."

As we act in solidarity with others in carrying the cross, we will fail at times.
Even when we mess up, there is always hope.
Jesus is always there for us.

As we act in social justice, we will fail at times.
Jesus is always there for us.

Father Gerry Hefferan
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