

SOCIAL JUSTICE & THE CROSS OF JESUS

REFLECTION 1



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There are so many questions to ask as we ponder the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Over the next few weeks we reflect on some of the dimensions in a spirituality of the Cross.

In this first reflection today, we draw on some of the insights of Pope Francis in his homily at the Chrism Mass.

THREE QUESTIONS

We raise three questions in today's reflection.

1. Do the *joyful Good News of Jesus Christ* and the *Cross of Jesus Christ* go together?
2. Could we say that the cross existed *throughout* the earthly life of Jesus?
3. Are we *scandalised by the Cross* and run away from it?

1. Do the joyful Good News of Jesus Christ and the Cross of Jesus Christ go together?

From the homily of Pope Francis at the 2021 Chrism Mass on April 1st, we discover insights into the Cross. Pope Francis teaches us how

'the hour of joyful proclamation, the hour of persecution and the hour of the cross go together.'

He explains this briefly and then offers examples.

'The preaching of the Gospel is always linked to the embrace of some particular cross.

The gentle light of God's word shines brightly in well-disposed hearts, but awakens confusion and rejection in those that are not.

We see this over and over again in the Gospels.

He shares these Gospel examples.

- *'The good seed sown in the field bears fruit – a hundred, sixty and thirty-fold – but it also arouses the envy of the enemy, who is driven to sow weeds during the night (cf. Mt 13:24-30.36-43).'*

- *'The tender love of the merciful father irresistibly draws the prodigal son home, but also leads to anger and resentment on the part of the elder son (cf. Lk 15:11-32).'*
- *'The generosity of the owner of the vineyard is a reason for gratitude among the workers called at the last hour, but it also provokes a bitter reaction by one of those called first, who is offended by the generosity of his employer (cf. Mt 20:1-16).'*
- *The closeness of Jesus, who dines with sinners, wins hearts like those of Zacchaeus, Matthew and the Samaritan woman, but it also awakens scorn in the self-righteous.*
- *The magnanimity of the king who sends his son, thinking that he will be respected by the tenant farmers, unleashes in them a ferocity beyond all measure. Here we find ourselves before the mystery of iniquity, which leads to the killing of the Just One (cf. Mt 21:33-46).*

These examples enable us

'to see that the preaching of the Good News is mysteriously linked to persecution and the cross.'

2. Could we say that the cross existed throughout the earthly life of Jesus?

We know that Jesus physically carried the cross and died on the same day.

And we know that many people carry their cross throughout their lives.

Pope Francis invites us to understand the cross from the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

He contemplates

'the early appearance of the cross – of misunderstanding, rejection and persecution – at the beginning and at the very heart of the preaching of the Gospel'

and highlights to us that

'we are taken aback to see the cross present in the Lord's life at the very beginning of his ministry, even before his birth.

It is already there in Mary's initial bewilderment at the message of the angel;

it is there in Joseph's sleeplessness, when he felt obliged to send Mary away quietly.

It is there in the persecution of Herod and in the hardships endured by the Holy Family, like those of so many other families obliged to live in exile from their homeland.

All this makes us realize that the mystery of the cross is present "from the beginning".

3. Are we scandalised by the Cross and run away from it?

Pope Francis challenges us:

'We are not scandalized,

because Jesus himself was not scandalized

by seeing that his joyful preaching of salvation to the poor

was not received wholeheartedly, but amid the shouts and threats of those who refused to hear his word

or wanted to reduce it to legalisms such as moralism or clericalism.

*We are not scandalized
because Jesus was not scandalized by having to heal the sick
and to set prisoners free amid the moralistic, legalistic and clerical squabbles
that arose every time he did some good.*

*We are not scandalized
because Jesus was not scandalized by having to give sight to the blind
amid people who closed their eyes in order not to see, or looked the other way.*

*We are not scandalized
because Jesus was not scandalized
that his proclamation of a year of grace of the Lord
– a year that embraces all of history –
provoked a public scandal in matters that today
would barely make the third page of a local newspaper.*

*We are not scandalized
because the preaching of the Gospel is effective not because of our eloquent words
but because of the power of the cross (cf. 1 Cor 1:17).
The way we embrace the cross in our preaching of the Gospel
– with deeds and, when necessary, with words – makes two things clear.
That the sufferings that come from the Gospel are not ours,
but rather “the sufferings of Christ in us” (2 Cor 1:5),
and that “we do not preach ourselves
but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants of all for the love of Jesus” (2
Cor 4:5).’*

The full 2021 Chrism Mass homily of Pope Francis is found on the link:
<https://bit.ly/FrancisChrism01042021>

FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

On September 14th each year is the *Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross*.
We are invited during this September series of reflections to ponder the Cross.

With the world so in need of justice and healing, let us explore together,
the relationship between social justice and the Cross of Jesus.

Father Gerry Hefferan
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Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross