



**September 3rd**

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

*But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

*Galatians 6:14*

## **Cross-bearer is another name for a Christian**

The cross of our Lord Jesus is inseparable from our lives as Christians. From the time of our baptisms, the tents of our bodies are marked with the cross. Anointed with the cross of Christ. This is because **on the cross**, Jesus, our paschal lamb, shed his blood for us. Now the Angel of Death passes over us, and we are filled with the divine life of the Holy Spirit. It is in the cross we find freedom, experience the liberation those first Hebrew people experienced when they crossed the river Jordan and made their way into the land God had given to them – Canaan, the land of milk and honey. Our lives are thus lived in the shadow of the cross.

We must also understand that the cross of Jesus Christ is not just an instrument of execution – not just the altar on which he offered himself as sacrifice for our sins. It is also intrinsic to our lives as followers of Jesus...*Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven* (As St. Rose of Lima). But carrying the cross is not easy. It was never meant to be a guarantee of an easy, burden free life.

## **The cross is soaked in our very existence, every part of life**

One aspect of the cross for Christians is the very real possibility that **we** might be someone else's cross – and probably, if the truth be told, we are. We are a significant part of Christ's cross. It was Jesus, who out of love for us willingly suffered death. Without his sacrifice on the cross, we all would be lost. Every time we see the cross it should be a powerful reminder of all God has done for us and an invitation to live under his blessings and divine graces. In our lives, any honest struggle to "bear with one another" out of love for Jesus Christ is a part of our carrying the cross.

Any honest struggle to stay true to God, true to love, true to the commandments, true to our faith, true to our hope as Christians will demand that we carry the cross, for it was out of love and obedience to his Father's will that Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha. As the cross was the vocation of Jesus, so too our calling is to bear the cross of Christ for the salvation and liberation of others.

## **We all need to discern and carry our own individual crosses**

Because each of our lives and challenges are unique, the cross is specific to each one of us. Each of us is called to bring God's saving love alive in our own daily lives and circumstances. For some, it can be bearing with a troublesome brother; for others it is coping and suffering in faith and trust through an illness or injury, or the loss of a loved one. Sometimes the cross is feeling a divine absence.

No two crosses are alike! The cross causes us to die to self, to surrender ourselves to God to live as God wants instead of pursuing our own priorities and desires. It seems as though God has knit the cross into the fabric of our lives. When we embrace it in faith, a paradox occurs. What seemed on the surface to be death, becomes the means through which God gives us life.

And not only ourselves, it is a source of life to all we meet. *Whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of the Gospel will find it.*

### **The cross is our light in the darkness a strength than will not wane**

Bearing the cross with faith and love is the greatest challenge we face as we walk the earth. It is the most meaningful and powerful tool for evangelism. The cross is fulfilled in our imitation of Jesus. When that cross comes, sometimes people are tempted to wonderask things like: “Did I do something and now God is mad at me? Am I being punished?” “Why is this happening to me?” “Does God love me?” “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” A person may be thrown into a crisis of faith. Just think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. But it is not this uncertainty that is the problem, it is what we do next, it is the taking up of *not my will but thine be done*. It is these times that our suffering Lord is very close to a person during those times. Remember God’s promise: *I will never forget you ... I have carved you on the palm of my hands.* (Is 49:15-16).

To persevere through times of suffering; to turn our suffering into joy; to allow our suffering to bring life and light to others, we need to trust God. To surrender to God. Just looking at the cross can help. Looking at our Lord crucified can strengthen us because we have been promised – *if you die with me you will rise with me*. As we ponder his cross, its power can bring forth a similar surrender within our souls. *Not my will Father, but thy will be done*. That must become our mantra, our daily prayer.

### **We need to reach out in humility and ask for divine grace**

The obvious truth is that we cannot carry the cross on our own if our sufferings are going to be a part of what God is doing in the world today. In our lives. If we simply endure the cross, put up with it and hope it goes away, then that cross is not the cross of Jesus. *He carried his cross for the sake of others*. His cross, his “carrying” was a saving activity, redemptive for all men and women. He intentionally took it up as a pledge to his Father *that sins may be forgiven*. This is the cross we celebrate every time we gather around the table of the Lord in celebrating the Eucharist.

No. We cannot carry the cross by our own power. We need divine help! That help began at our baptism when we “died **with Christ**,” and it continues throughout our lives. One of the great ways to be encouraged to embrace the cross is to read sacred Scripture and passages that deal with the cross. Prayerfully ponder the cross and ask for the faith, hope, and love necessary to embrace whatever cross we are facing in our lives, that those moments might become salvific for others. This is embracing the cross and not just putting up with it and hoping it goes away.

The cross puts sin to death. The cross brings light alive to those who struggle in darkness. The cross draws love for God and compassion for others out of us. The cross is the suffering in our lives that conforms us to Christ. It is the faith Jesus had in his father as he lived and preached the Good News of the Kingdom.

*We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered.” Galatians 6:14* The cross of Christ, then, is a reminder of God’s great love for every man, woman and child; it is the source of our forgiveness, reconciliation and peace; it is the means by which all people are offered a sharing in the communion of life and love with God; it is the throne on which Jesus established the kingdom of God in His very person.”