



## We live under the sign of the cross<sup>+</sup>

**But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.  
– St. Paul**

The *sign of the cross*<sup>+</sup> is both powerful and foundational for our lives as Christians. Without that sign as a dynamic part of who we are in the world, we cannot say we know Christ Jesus as our King and Saviour. By it we proclaim and celebrate that we are children of God, that we have thrown off the slavery of Satan and have embraced the Cross of Christ as the way to salvation. The Cross destroyed death and hell, and through it, Jesus redeemed the world. What we do when we wear a cross, or make the sign of the cross, we are acknowledging the divine redemption that has been given to us in Jesus Christ.

Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (386 AD) wrote that Satan flees before the Cross as it is a reminder of the salvation gained through it. He knows that anyone making the sign of the cross lives under divine protection, and he is powerless against them. He urges Christians to *make this sign at eating and drinking, at sitting, at lying down, at rising up, at speaking, at walking: in a word, at every act.*

### **Let us not then be ashamed to confess the Crucified<sup>+</sup>**

There are sadly, still many Christians who ardently believe that only Catholics wear the crucifix. That to believe Christ is Risen means we need to take the body off the cross. Christian spirituality from the early Church onwards shows us how that could not be further from the Truth. Gazing upon the body of Christ nailed to the cross is a reminder of my own sinfulness and the extreme sacrifice that was required for me to be free. It resonates with the love God has for all of us, an incomprehensible love that call for nothing less than the sacrificial death of the Father's Only begotten Son, a man like us in all things but sin.

The crucifix is the beacon of hope for all humanity, a reminder of the victory of Jesus over Satan, the forgiveness of sins and the opening of the way to life eternal. It teaches us the meaning of love, of humble service, the forgiveness of enemies, mercy and serves as a reminder that Jesus expects us to pick up our own crosses and follow him along the Way to the Father.



Jesus from the cross calls out for me to *love one another as I have loved you*. I see in the crucifix that which Paul saw... *Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and*

*foolishness to Gentiles,* <sup>24</sup> *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24).*

From the crucifix Jesus preaches a powerful message of hope and encouragement. Suffering is not something to be feared, he proclaims, an indication of weakness and powerlessness. He turned his own suffering into a servant of our salvation and promises us that when taken up our own sufferings in faith and hope we can unite ourselves to him in a way that truly sets us free. Jesus crucified alone can make sense of and give purpose to human suffering.



### **The Crucified Christ – a pledge of the Fathers love for us**

Looking upon the cross provides me with an answer to the question of Job: *God, will you remember me beyond my grave?* “Yes”, says the crucified Christ. I see in that battered and bruised, broken and lifeless body God’s guarantee that those who die in His Son will inherit life eternal and share in Christ’s victory over death and the grave. It stands as a beacon of Hope, proclaiming salvation through the one perfect sacrifice. When we look at a crucifix, it is never without the awareness that Christ’s suffering ended in the victory of the resurrection. And when we rejoice in the resurrection, we are to be always mindful of the fact that it sprang from the perfect sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary.

A plain cross, as opposed to a crucifix can indicate the source of salvation without too vivid a reminder of the actual suffering involved—the wounds, the blood, the death. It can sanitize those horrific events, shielding us from the enormous cost of our sinful ways and lukewarm response to God. It suggests that the crucifixion was best left in the past where salvation was achieved in that once only act on Golgotha. In so doing, it risks minimising the collaboration of all believers in God’s saving works in creation that continue until the Son of God returns.

The idea that Jesus suffered so we do not have to is simply not true. Peter says, *For to this [suffering] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).* Jesus’ suffering transformed our own suffering and so we too can now collaborate in God’s saving works in human history. This is what Jesus meant when he commanded *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27).* Not only are we called to suffer like Jesus, i.e., in imitation of him, but we are called to suffer *with* Jesus, to participate in the one redeeming sacrifice of Calvary. This is the grace invitation that speaks out to us from the image of Christ crucified – *the cup that I will drink, you will also drink... (Mark 10:39) ... Rejoice in so far as you share in the sufferings of Christ that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:13).* When we suffer and bring those sufferings before the Lord in faith, in hope and in love, we understand those sufferings in a new light... *I have*

*been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20).* Finally, saving the “best two” until the end, we have two of the most powerfully rejuvenating passages from Paul...*I have suffered the loss of all things . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:8, 10-11).... We are] fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:17).*

### **In Christ, our sufferings too can be “salvific”**



These were significant theological insights from St Paul, an Apostle who suffered much in the name of Christ. Nowhere does he promise believers a struggle free, pain free, death free life. Quite the contrary. He understands the invitation of Christ on the cross to join our own sufferings with his. This is not because suffering is good in itself. It is not. What Paul sees is the invitation of Christ to be at one with our Saviour in sacrificing ourselves for the greater good of His Body the Church... *Now I rejoice in my own sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, that is, the church*". That text alone should be enough for us to

be doing spiritual cartwheels of joy because of the vital connection between our personal participation in the sufferings of Christ and reaping the fruits of those sufferings—i.e., grace for other members of the body, glory, resurrection, the inheritance of Christ.

What? After two thousand years there is still redemption to be achieved? His saving activities on the cross *were* perfect and complete. What we do as we fulfil our Christian vocations is to ensure every man woman and child on earth knows of that gift and understands the way to participating in all that Christ has done. This is our sharing in the mission of Jesus, a mission he received from the Father and passed on to his Apostles and disciples. It is a mission in which we participate through baptism and renew every time we celebrate the Eucharist.

Each Eucharist we gather at Calvary, around the foot of the cross on which Jesus hangs. Not re-crucifying him but being drawn into that single salvific sacrifice all those years ago. But we have an advantage the disciples did not have. We know how it ends. We know that in dying he destroyed death and in rising he restored life. When, at the end of the Eucharist the priest proclaims: Go in peace! Love and serve the Lord! We know what he means – take the crucified Christ out into the ends of the earth that all may know and experience the saving love of God.

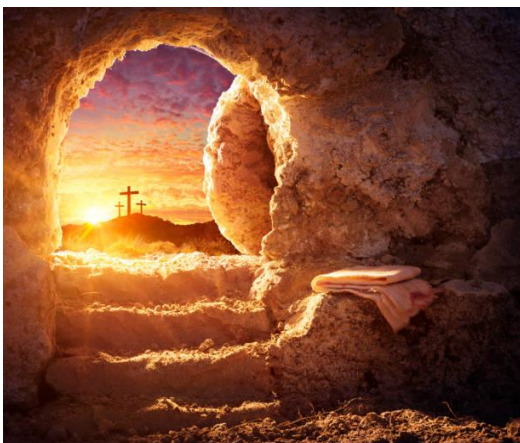
## Conclusion:

This Eastertide what we are doing when we keep the crucifix front and centre of our reflections and our daily living, is offering the world Easter hope. We are doing what Moses did when he lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Those Israelites who looked upon the snake lived. It was a reference Jesus applied to himself when he declared. *so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life* (**John 3:14–15**).

Just as Moses knew that for healing to occur, the people needed to see not just a plain pole but the serpent on the pole, so too our needy world needs to have the opportunity of looking beyond the sign of the cross and see nailed there the crucified body of their Saviour. It is the Lamb who was slain for our sins that has the power and desire to transform all things into good and as bearers of the crucifix. It is our joy and a blessing to be able to proclaim that hope before their very eyes.



*As they were looking on, so we too gaze on his wounds as he hangs. We see his blood as he dies. We see the price offered by the redeemer, touch the scars of his resurrection. He bows his head, as if to kiss you. His heart is made bare open, as it were, in love to you. His arms are extended that he may embrace you. His whole body is displayed for your redemption. Ponder how great these things are. Let all this be rightly weighed in your mind: as he was once fixed to the cross in every part of his body for you, so he may now be fixed in every part of your soul. – St. Augustine*



*Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about.* N.

T. Wright