

**“The way you think is not God’s way but man’s.”**

***Mk 8:33***

Yesterday was the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and today, were it not a Sunday, would be the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows.

It is not accidental but an act of Divine Providence that this weekend’s feast falls, more or less, six months between last Good Friday and next Good Friday, thereby reminding us halfway through the year of the death of Christ on the Cross.

The feast of the Exaltation of the Cross is about the Passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is also about marking the triumph of the *means* by which Christ redeemed the world. God is not some form of celestial magician who waves a wand to sort out this world’s problems.

Instead, our God is a personal God who, having created us so that we might live with Him forever – and share with Him all the graces and blessings of the heavenly places that He would have us share (Eph 1:3) – does not abandon us when things go wrong. Rather, as Emmanuel, as the God-who-is-with-us (Mt 1:23), He enters into the messy and painful consequences of sin, forgives those sins, takes those consequences upon Himself, purifies those consequences, and raises us up to an even higher plane of existence than we would otherwise have attained had there been no sin in the first place!

But the *means* He chose to do all this are remarkable. The Son of God willed to be crucified. Now, we are used to seeing crucifixes, and in our most fervent moments of prayer we may be moved by what we see. But most of the time we probably take the Cross, hanging on our walls at home, at work, in church, more or less in our stride. We probably don’t take *too* much notice. The crucifix is just there, in the background of our lives. At one

level, that is good. It means that the crucifix is part and parcel of our lives, part of our way of thinking, our mindset.

But in truth, death by crucifixion was one of the most barbaric forms of execution known to the Roman world. It was so heinous that no Roman citizen had to suffer it. If a Roman citizen, like St Paul, were to be executed then he could have his head cleanly chopped off instead.

The markings on the Turin Shroud, which will be displayed for veneration during the Holy Year next year, bear witness to the horror of the death suffered by Christ. They bear testimony that Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ willed to enter into our human condition, to stand next to us, to be with us, even to the extent of undergoing suffering and death. Yet God willed even more than that. It was Our Lord's will to make use of some of the things that He Himself had made – iron nails, a crown of twisted thorns, a sponge soaked in vinegar, spittle from the mocking lips of passers-by, and above all the wood of a tree – to bring about the redemption of His own created order through not just any death but through the most ignominious death known at the time.

The wood of the Cross: standing in the place of the Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden, it now stands as the means by which death is overcome and life becomes victorious. The Son of God takes what we have damaged, what we have twisted through misuse, and turns it on its head, as it were, until it accomplishes the very opposite of what, through our sins, we had used it for. Grace springs forth from the now re-ordered pit of sin. Life springs forth from death, until St Paul can cry, 'O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?'

Is it any wonder the world does not understand? How on earth can dying miserably on a Cross bring about redemption from sin and eternal life? To the world, it just doesn't make sense. At every turn, the Christian message contradicts the values and

philosophies of the world. There is simply no meeting point between the profane world of sin out there and sacred realm of heaven which we encounter in here.

If we Catholics ever feel misunderstood by the world, then that is because we are. If we ever feel somehow alienated from the world, then that is because we are in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:14-16). The people around us are looking and looking for their souls to be satisfied. They are hungry, but they look for food in the gutter of this world's ideologies. Catholics are similarly hungry, but we look upwards, to God and the things of God. Our eyes are fixed on something quite different from what everyone else's eyes are fixed on.

Our eyes are fixed on the Cross, the symbol of our salvation. But it is more than a symbol. It is the very means by which the despair of loss and death was conquered through death itself, and by which the longing for life is satisfied by Him who is Life itself.

On Good Friday, we commemorate the death of our Beloved Saviour. On the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, we exalt in the triumph of the means by which that death became victorious.

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