

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Adopted from 'Sunday Examiner'

The Israelites were a stubborn, ungrateful people, who, though liberated from the slavery of Egypt, constantly complained against Moses and against God during their sojourn in the desert as they made their way to freedom and the promised land. The path to freedom was no doubt difficult. On occasion they were hungry, without water, subject to the elements, surely hot and tired. They were resented by the different tribes they encountered along the way and were forced to fight bloody to overcome them.

Nevertheless, they had ample reason to praise and thank God, who had been responsible for their escape from slavery, who accompanied them on their way, who intervened to provide for their basic needs and who protected them from their enemies. But it was never enough. They were never satisfied and constantly cried out against Moses and God. Typical of their protest is that found in Numbers 20:3-5: "Would that we had perished with our kinsmen in the Lord's presence! Why have you brought the community into this desert where we and our livestock are dying? Why did you lead out of Egypt, only to bring us to this wretched place where there is neither grain nor figs nor vines there is not even water to drink!" They preferred the slavery of Egypt to the hardships they met on the way to freedom promised by the Lord.

Once, in the midst of their complaining, God became exasperated with them and sent poisonous snakes among them as a punishment. Many died of snake-bite before the remainder admitted they were wrong to have complained. To Moses they begged: "Pray the Lord take the serpents from us." In response to his prayer God ordered him to make an image of a seraph and lifted it up on a pole; anyone who looked upon it would be saved from the snakes. And so it happened.

With this story in mind and surely known to Nicodemus, Jesus said to him: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all who believe may have eternal life in him." He was lifted up on the cross on Calvary and, again, from the tomb at his resurrection. We are asked to look on him and believe as the Roman soldier did at the foot of the cross. "Truly this person is the Son of God." Truly we believe, as the song says, that he died for us and is risen from the dead, is our saving Lord and joy for all ages.

In the celebration of the Eucharist we make that belief present to us here and now by following the command of Jesus to do as he did at the last supper, We take bread, bless and break it and in his words say: THIS IS MY BODY— and it becomes His body, crucified and risen. And we take the wine as he did, saying THIS IS THE CUP OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT—and it becomes his blood poured out for us on Calvary. This is the source of our salvation, the living memorial of his being lifted up to draw all people to himself. By eating and drinking as he has told us to do, we not only look on him but are drawn into the most profound communion with him. We believe and so are Christians, and by believing and eating we let him transform us into persons more like himself.

In order to further deepen our faith we Catholics have found the physical representations of Jesus Crucified, the crucifix, most helpful in drawing us near to him who was lifted up for our sake. Devotion to the suffering Christ has been a constant sign of holy and penitential lives. Truly holy people have a deep sense of their own sinfulness and how their sins have been responsible for the suffering and death of the Lord. They are aware, more than most of what it means that "He died for our sins" and are more inclined to do penance for their own sins and those of the whole world.

One of the church's greatest theologians, Thomas Aquinas, is reputed to have said at the end of a long and productive life that what he had written was but mere dust compared to what he had learned at the foot of the crucifix, contemplating the suffering and death of Jesus. The crucifix is the image of Jesus lifted up and has been the cause of many being called from a life of sin and beyond the despair which many others, weighed down by sorrow, have brought to Jesus on the cross.

It might not be amiss to suggest to all who took for some way to spend special time during Lent, to consider making the STATIONS OF THE CROSS privately in church or even in their own homes. It is a traditionally beautiful way to get in touch with the suffering Jesus, who though risen and glorified, only became so through his willing obedience and submission to his Father's will and thus was lifted up on the cross to die for us. Believe, and have eternal life!

READINGS OF THE WEEK

2 Chronicles 36:13-23

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

March 18, 2012

靈 修 生 活

十 字 架 靈 修

耶穌對門徒說：「誰若願意跟隨我，該棄絕自己，背著自己的十字架來跟隨我，因為誰若願意救自己的性命，必要喪失性命；但誰若為我的原故，喪失自己的性命，必要獲得性命。」(瑪十六 24~25)

基督信徒是誰？基督信徒是跟隨基督的人。誰是跟隨基督的人？背負自己十字架的人，相似基督背十字架的人。十字架是基督教會的標誌，為人指示基督教會是怎樣的教會，為人指示基督信徒是怎樣的信徒。

談到十字架，一般人就連想到苦難，即使是基督信徒也會如此想。其實，基督要跟隨祂的人背負的十字架，不是有形的木十字架，而是另有所指，另有含義。十字架是指基督信徒應做的是什麼，不一定指克己苦身。

拿起一個有形的十字架，看到它由兩根木條交叉而成；若有基督被釘於中央，便稱「苦像」，苦像就是基督信徒的生活指南，基督信徒的靈修手冊。所以，基督信徒的靈修是「十字架靈修」。這樣想、這樣懂、這樣講、這樣做的基督徒可能還不多。

基督所講的靈修包括在「愛天主、愛人」一句話之中，十字架是這句話的有形指標。

組成十字架的兩根木條，一豎一橫，一指上下，一指左右，基督就在中央，既聯合天上地下，又懷抱左鄰右舍。十字架上的基督啟示我們：祂是敬天愛人的，誰願跟隨祂，做祂的門徒，也要像祂一樣釘在十字架上，敬天父，愛眾人，做祂所做的。祂已身先士卒地做了，基督信徒應緊緊跟隨，亦步亦趨。這就是祂要求我們背自己十字架的意義。

祂在十字架的中央，並非佔了榮譽的位置，而是十字架靈修的最好位置。祂抬頭望天，孝愛天父，領受天父的使命，救贖普世萬民，給萬民分賜天父的恩惠。祂伸開雙手，接受世人對天父的虔誠敬禮，獻給天父，轉達世人的懺悔，求天父寬恕。祂在十字架上，做真正救世主的工作，完成天父給祂的使命，這是祂的「靈修」|假使我們可以這樣說。

在十字架上，祂濃縮了一生的靈修生活，我們姑且用祂在十字架上的心聲，探察一下祂的靈修精神。

先看十字架上豎的一條：祂指「上下」的關係，耶穌把天父的愛傳給世人。「天主竟這樣愛了世界，甚至賜下了自己的獨生子，使凡信祂的人不至喪亡，反而獲得永生。」(若三 16) 怎樣使人獲得永生？「人子來不是受服事，而是服事人，並交出自己的生命，為大眾作贖價。」(瑪二十 28) 耶穌的一生，就是照天父的意旨，絲毫不爽，所以祂可以向天父說：「完成了。」(若十九 36)「父啊！我把我的靈魂交托在你手中。」(路二十三 48) 這是上下的關係，祂已在門徒之先，「全心、全靈、全力愛上主天主。」(申六 5) 他自己如怨如慕地說：「我的天主，我的天主！你為什麼捨棄了我？」(瑪二十七 46)

至於十字架的橫木，意味著基督關懷一切世人。祂先求天父寬恕祂的敵人：「父啊！寬赦他們罷！因為他們不知道他們做的是什麼。」(路二十三 34) 然後自己賜福給右盜：「我實在告訴你：今天你就要與我一同在樂園裡。」(路二十三 43)

還有一句：「我渴。」若望說：「為應驗經上的話，遂說：『我渴』。」(若十九 28) 這是對世人的「遺囑叮嚀」。因為聖經是基督信徒的生活寶鑑，祂自己一生循此而生活，門徒絕對不容輕易放棄。基督的使命不只在幫助人們升天，還要促成世上的「四海一家」，祂臨終時對瑪利亞說：「女人，看，妳的兒子！」對若望說：「看，你的母親」(參若十九 26) 基督信徒應是一家人。

十字架靈修深奧而又豐富的含義是默想不盡的！

摘自「見證」月刊

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 二 年 三 月 十 八 日

編下 36:14-23 ; 弗 2:4-10 ; 若 3:14-21