

The Cross of Jesus

Palm Sunday (Year A)

April 5, 2020

Fr. Tony Davis

In his book *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*, black theologian James Cone says, “there is no one way in which the cross can be interpreted.” He says, “the cross can heal and hurt; it can be empowering and liberating but also enslaving and oppressive.” (xix) Each time we look at the cross, something different can strike us.

We see this very dynamic of multiple interpretations of the cross at play in our second reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians. This famous passage has two parts: the first part is the hurting and the emptying. This first section goes so far as to identify Jesus as a slave, an interesting parallel for contemporary black theology in America. This slave, “they put him to death by hanging him on a tree,” (Acts 10:39) another parallel. He was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Then, the second part of the passage is the healing and the exultation. It says, “because of this, God greatly exulted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.” It concludes with the proclamation, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Both parts of this reading are essential. The ordering is important, too.

At times, we should see how the cross hurts. Just as the cross was a place of sacrifice for Jesus, it reminds us of how we hurt, both personally and at the sight of the pain of others. Hurt invites us into solidarity. As Cone says, “the cross places God in the midst of the crucified people, in the midst of people who are hung, shot, burned, and tortured.” (26) The cross of Jesus and the sufferings of others take us into the depths of human oppression. At other times, we should see how the cross heals. Just as the passion of Jesus led to his glorious resurrection, so too, the sacrifices we undergo make us stronger and more resilient. Our wounds become reminders of what we have been through. They become part of our life story, individually and collectively. The cross of Jesus and the victories of others raise us up to the glory of God the Father.

The cross both hurts and heals us.

On this Palm Sunday, as we reflect on the scripture passages and prepare ourselves for Holy Week, let us look upon the cross of Jesus. May we allow it to do both: hurt and heal.