

**Fr. Michael O'Brien**

Friends, I invite you to gaze upon the painting of our Lord on the cross beside me. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. To understand the cross is how we come to know Christ. It is at the foot of the cross that we confront the mystery of our faith—the promise of eternal life in the midst of death. St. Paul tells us that it is Christ crucified that we must preach as Christian people. We may be tempted to ask what is the point of remembering the Passion of Jesus—why can't we go right to His Resurrection, but, If we were to skip over the events of Good Friday, what meaning would there be in Easter Sunday? It is the sacrificial love of Jesus for His people that is best displayed through the crucifix. Jesus is more than a moral teacher, he is more than a prophet, he is more than just a nice guy, he is the Redeemer of humanity, the Son of God. The early Church chose the Cross as its central symbol even though the Cross was associated with criminal execution. Jesus wanted the sacrifice of his life remembered, therefore it is vital that we come to know Christ through the cross. They cannot be separated. That's why we venerate the cross, that's why we wear the cross around our necks, to symbolize our Christianity. To show the world the **price** that God's Son paid for our redemption. The solemnity of the cross is increasingly lost upon society today. As Christians we must never forget, nor take for granted, the perfect love Christ gave us through the cross. It stands as a bridge between a broken people and a Holy God.

Each of us struggles to hear and respond to God's word in our lives. We are not always going to like what we hear in God's word, because God's word challenges us to move beyond where we are, it pushes us to go beyond our own will and embrace God's will. As those baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, being faithful to God's word always means dying to self for the sake of others. That's what real love is, forsaking yourself for the other. Christ on the cross is the greatest example we have of this sacrificial love. Today we remember that day so long ago when Jesus suffered and died

for us. Each of us as well has his or her own share in the Redemption when we offer up our suffering to Christ. The witnesses of the cross and resurrection were convinced that only after many trials and tribulations would we enter the kingdom of God. To share in the sufferings of Christ is to suffer for the Kingdom of God that awaits us. Jesus did not conceal from us the need for suffering. He said very clearly: If any man would come after me...let him take up his cross daily (Lk. 9:23).

Therefore let us offer up our sufferings, let us unite them to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Offer your pain, your illness, your anguish to the Lord. Offer your grief, your loneliness to the Lord. Lift high your cross of disappointment and disillusionment. Those who carry their cross daily become wounded healers, while those who refuse to carry, risk falling under the weight of their cross.

Friends, imagine yourself in this scene depicted in the painting and written of in the gospel. Put yourself at the foot of the cross on that dark day when Jesus died for us. Look at Jesus' hands. See how they are fastened to the Cross with nails—not little nails, but big spikes. Jesus never used his hands for anything but for healing people and blessing them. See how Jesus feet are nailed as well. There is no way for Him to move at all. His feet never walked anywhere where He did not help people. But now the hands and feet of Jesus are nailed to the cross. Look at the crown on His head. It is a crown of thorns. His head aches and bleeds as the thorns stick into his skin. When that thorn bush was growing in a field, nobody knew that someone would pick the thorny branches and use them to hurt Jesus.

His face is full of sweat and blood. He would like to wipe it, but he can't. He is thirsty, but no one will give him a drink. His clothes are gone, and he feels the sharp wind against his body, yet no one covers him. His mother Mary, his disciple John and some others are near him, but they are not allowed to help him. All the other disciples have abandoned him, he is alone. His life is ending, soon he will be dead.

Move close to Jesus and tell Him how sorry you are that he is suffering. Tell Him how sorry you are for anything you have done, that made Him suffer. Thank him for loving you, and sacrificing His life for you. Remember His words. Whatsoever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me. Promise Jesus that when you look at the very old, you will see his face. When you hold the hand of a child, you are holding His. When you defend someone being made fun of, you defend Him. When you do a selfless act without reward or recognition, you do it for Him. When you choose to make good decisions rather than choosing to be popular, you are embracing the cross. When you feel alone and abandoned, you suffer as He did, and He suffers with you. When you die to yourself a little more each day, you are sharing in the carrying of His cross. The same Jesus you see on the cross is with you now, in others, in spirit, in the Eucharist. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Stay near him, today and always.