



The Way of the Cross

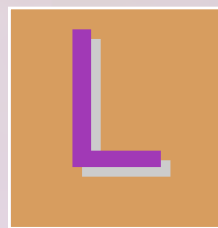
February 2008

Dear Friend of the Missions,

Happy Leap Year! February is the shortest month of the year, but there are still a lot of things happening. February 2 is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. It is the day that the Church blesses candles and honors Jesus as the Light whom the darkness can not overcome. February 3 is the Feast of St. Blaise. On this day the Church blesses throats. Lent is very early this year: Ash Wednesday is February 6. It is a day of strict fast and abstinence. Perhaps as you make some sacrifice, you can use the money you save to help feed people who have no food. February 22 is the Feast of the Chair of Peter, a good day to pray for Pope Benedict XVI. On February 10, the Church celebrates the Rite of Election usually at the Cathedral with the bishop. On this day, those who are catechumens (not baptized) are called as candidates for baptism at the Easter Vigil. (Please keep them in your prayers.) Each February, the Church has a day set aside to remember those in religious life (Feb 3), those who are sick (Feb 11) and those who are married (Feb 10). Please join the Church in prayer for those groups. Be assured of our prayers for you and your intentions, especially that this Lent will be a time of personal renewal for you and your loved ones. **God bless you all for your generosity to the missions!**



By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM



Lord Jesus, you willingly embraced the wood of the cross as an act of total surrender in love to the Father and the reconciliation of the entire universe. Today, as we retrace your steps, send us your Spirit so that our hearts may be warmed and our lives renewed. May the example and invitation of your love inspire us to forsake selfishness and embrace wholeheartedly the way to glory.--Prayer to begin the Way of the Cross.



Almost from the very beginning of Christianity, pilgrims have visited the Holy Land in order to see and experience the places which were associated with the life of Christ. There the pilgrims were able to identify more closely with the Lord as they visited the place where he was born, where he preached and performed miracles, where he suffered, died, was buried and rose again.

One of the most popular places to visit was Jerusalem where the pilgrims were able to follow the footsteps of Christ on the way to Calvary and to the Holy Sepulcher. They brought the customs which were part of the life of the Church in the Holy Land back to their own homelands. The experience of walking Via Dolorosa and coming to the place where Jesus died and was buried was most memorable, and soon the devotion of the Way of the Cross began to

be used in other places to help people identify more closely with the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, and coming to a deeper appreciation of the depth of God's love for us.

The devotion was encouraged by a friar, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, who was one of the great Franciscan preachers who lived in the eighteenth century. The Stations of the Cross devotion was associated with the Franciscans because of their responsibility for the shrines of the Holy Land which began in 1342. It is still the custom to invite a Franciscan priest to bless Stations in a new church or when new stations are acquired by a church.

There is a processional aspect to the Stations. Usually they are prayed while walking from station to station. It is even best when all

the people walk along when the devotion is done as part of Lenten devotions in a parish, instead of just having the leader and assistants. Walking is a better reminder than watching others walk.

We are all familiar with the invitation that Jesus gives us to take up our Cross and follow after him. This devotion helps to make that invitation come alive for us in this present time. By following the Way of the Cross we can journey with the Lord in selflessness, pain and suffering and on to glory.

*There is no greater love than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends.
[John 15,13]*



JOURNEY TO SELFLESSNESS. The Way of the Cross teaches us about Jesus and the selfless love which he showed for us in his passion and death. Selflessness can seem to be an almost unreachable possibility for us and is certainly against worldly wisdom. But when we take up our cross and follow the Lord, we learn the way of selflessness. If Jesus died for us all, then perhaps we can learn from him how we can die to self and begin to live, as Jesus lived, with selfless compassion for all. The depth of love which he bore for us is recalled in the Way of the Cross. Only love could enable someone to suffer so much for the sake of others.

*Stronger than death is love; its flames are a blazing fire.
Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away.
[Song of Songs 8,6-7]*

JOURNEY OF PAIN AND SUFFERING. Remembering the suffering and death of the Lord helps us to endure our own suffering. We walk with Jesus on the way of his suffering and we come to know in faith that Jesus walks with us in our suffering. The confidence that Jesus had, that the Father was with him and would not abandon him, reminds us that we are not alone. In our darkest moments we often fear that we are abandoned by God. But we know that God is with us and suffers with us even to this very day. For the weak he becomes weak, to save those who suffer.

*If we die with him, we shall
also live with him;
if we hold out to the end we
shall also reign with him.
[2 Timothy 2,11-13]*



JOURNEY TO GLORY. The Way of the Cross ends with the burial in the tomb. That is what the enemies of the Lord thought. For us the tomb becomes the womb out of which new life is born. Christ, who suffered and died, is the source of new life for us all. If we have died with Christ, we shall live with Christ. For Christ, having risen from the dead, dies no more. That is what gives us hope of life for ever in Christ.

*I have been crucified with Christ,
and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me.*

*I still live my human life,
but it is a life of faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me.*

[Galatians 20,19-20]



As we come to the end of the journey with Jesus Christ on the Way of the Cross, our goal is to have the same faith the Apostle Paul lived. May this Lent help us to embrace the Cross willingly in gratitude to the Lord Jesus for his saving work. Do not be

afraid to walk the Via Dolorosa, it will lead you to the Via Gloriosa.

Lord, by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free.

You are the Savior of the world..

[Memorial Acclamation]

Reflection Questions

1. What does “take up your cross” mean for you?
2. Do you notice how God helps you to bear the crosses of life?
3. Are you willing to help others bear their crosses?

Please Remember Fr. Aubrey McNeil, O.F.M

(Home Missions), his birthday is Feb.16

*May God bless him and give him strength
and energy in his ministry*

**Please remember our present and former
missionaries who are ill:**

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Joseph Ganssle, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Charles Finnegan, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Bishop Benedict Coscia, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

Fr. Arthur Murray, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)

Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

**Give them health, joy and length of days,
O God!**

Let's give up something different for this Lent.

By Bob Zyskowski

Let's give up looking for a pat on the back. This Lent, let's do at least one thing each day for someone who will never be able to repay us. When we get good at that, we can try doing something each day for someone who will never even be able to thank us.

Let's give up trying to be comfortable all the time. Instead of seeking comfort, let's find something to be enthusiastic about and put God's gifts—our brains, our talents, our resources—to work on behalf of some good activity, organization or program.

Let's give up trying to one-up others. There is a Hindu proverb that goes like this: "There is nothing noble in being superior to some other person. True nobility comes from being superior to your previous self." Let's find something we can improve about ourselves.

Let's give up taking care of No. 1. Instead of thinking about how everything and anything impacts us, let's worry first about how others are going to be affected—by proposed new laws, by policies, by trends, economic shifts—by our own actions and behavior.

Let's give up being practical. Instead, let's be kind. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta once said: "Kind words can be short, but their echoes are endless."

Let's give up being in a hurry. Let's show patience. Start in the checkout line and extend it to every situation within our families and workplaces. Waiting in line, waiting on hold on the

phone, waiting at the traffic light are all good times to say an extra prayer, to start a conversation with God, to listen to what the Lord has to say to us. Even try the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Let's not curse. We can vent in our minds if that will help us get over a bit of anger, but keep it internal. Let's not give voice to our anger, but instead give ourselves time to think of something constructive to say.

Let's not pile on. When someone is being taken to task, rather than joining in hitting an easy target, let's think about how we might help solve the problem we face.

Let's not talk about people with whom we have issues. Let's talk with them. Beats stewing and conjuring up questionable reasons for whatever it is that is troubling us.

Let's not argue over small things. Let us save our passions and energy for things that really matter. And let's argue about those things until others understand why we are so passionate.

Let's not be bitter. Rather than holding onto hurts, let's decide to have a forgiving spirit. Think of being bitter like taking poison and expecting someone else to die. When we're bitter, we only hurt ourselves.

Found in St. Anthony's Brief, published by the FMU from the Irish Province