

“Latin Cross, Roman Cross, Protestant Cross”
Ash Wednesday

2/18/15

Grace, Mercy, Peace, and Life are yours from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and they surely died, spiritually and physically (Genesis 2:17). Adam and Eve brought sin into the world and all mankind inherited it. The Psalmist wrote (Psalm 50:5), **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Doomed before we had a chance, but God said to the tempter, the serpent, the devil, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall crush your head, and you shall crush His heel”** (Genesis 3:15). The stage was set: sin, death, and the devil must be destroyed. How was it going to take place? No one knew. But they knew there would be someone born of a woman Who would crush the serpent’s head, but in doing so He, the Crusher, must suffer an excruciating death. The serpent had bitten the people with the deadliest of venom, sin, and he must die, and sin must be paid for, an antidote must be given or the people of the world would perish. How? How, would this all take place? In Numbers 21(4-9) we are shown the snake on a pole. In Psalms 22:1 we see great pain, **“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!”** In Isaiah 52 and 53 we see a more telling story: **“He would be marred beyond all recognition... be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquity.”** And, then, Jesus says, **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake, so He would be lifted up”** (John 3:14). All these prophecies of the Old Testament were made when crucifixion on a cross was not a means for punishment.

In A.D. 28-30, the cross was used as an altar to sacrifice our Lord and Savior to pay for the sin of the world as Jesus carried out His Father’s will. This was to fulfill God’s promise made in the Garden of Eden. In those days the cross was used as an instrument of capital punishment. It was reserved for the lowest of criminals. The cross conjured up thoughts of low-life, torture, and disgrace; and feelings of revulsion, disgust, and rejection. Today we glory in the cross and rightly so. The

early Christians' glorying in the cross sounded to the world something like glorying in the electric chair, the gallows, beheading or the lethal injection by needle. Actually, the cross was a much more gruesome way of death. To much of the world this is odd or repulsive. St. Paul wrote, **“For the message of the cross is folly/foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are saved it is the power of God”** (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The cross today is the most recognizable symbol in the world. What is the symbol of the Hindus? What is the symbol Buddhism? What is the symbol of the Jehovah Witness'? What is the symbol of Taoism? What is the symbol of Judaism or Islam? These last two are certainly more noticeable today with all the news but even these symbols don't have the recognition of the cross. What is the symbol of the computer company called..... “Apple”? Oh, yes, and apple with a bite out of it. No symbol is more prevalent than the cross. There are over 500 different types of crosses. Is this good or bad? We would think it is certainly good, however many of these crosses take on meanings of evil rather than the symbol of life. Today the cross is adorned by many, but many of these people are not Christians. The cross over 2,000 years has become **sanitized**. It has become clean and tidy. The cross has found its way as pretty jewelry and nick knacks. What has happened to the symbol of **“the power of God”**? St. Paul wrote that, **“God did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power”** (1 Corinthians 1:17). It appears, even among Christians, that the “Cross of Christ” has been emptied of its power as we take it for granted.

The Psalmist wrote, *“¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”* (Psalm 121:1–2, ESV) The hills and mountains often symbolize God's creation, command and power. The hills are always chosen as strong vantage points for safety and protection. On a hill far away in Jerusalem there was planted a tree. This tree was no ordinary tree. It was upon this tree where the presence, the command and the power of God was displayed and provided for all mankind. It was upon this tree that God provided for the world,

you and me, safety and protection from the greatest enemy of man (Galatians 3:13). The tree planted on this hill, Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull) (Matthew 27:33), also known as Calvary, was a cross. Not just any cross but the “Cross of Calvary.”

What took place on the cross? Justice was rendered for sin, love was displayed, and sinners set free. All this took place on a bloody Roman pole and cross beam. On the cross Christ was crucified, suffering and dying an excruciating death. I said, “**an excruciating death.**” On the Cross of Christ was displayed the power of God. Jesus paid the price for all mankind. Every sin ever committed in the past and every sin to be committed in the future was paid for on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus’ suffering had to be horrific, to say the very least, to pay the price for all mankind. St. Peter wrote, “²⁴ *He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*” (1 Peter 2:24, ESV). St. John wrote, “² *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*” (1 John 2:2, ESV)

Yes, an excruciating death took place on the Cross of Calvary. The word “**excruciating**” comes from the Latin word “**excruciat**” which translated means, “**the pain from the crucified one**” or “**out of the crucified.**” The pain from the crucified Christ: His wounds, His suffering, and His death allows the world, you and me, to be freed from our sins.

During the Lenten Season, as we walk to Easter, we will be looking at difference crosses chosen for their meanings and how they might relate to our sins and why Jesus had to die. Each week you will be given another cross to hang on the cross each family will be given tonight. The first cross given is the most familiar of all crosses. It is also the simplest of all the crosses. Some call this cross the “**Protestant Cross**” as it is devoid of the corpus, the body. Some Protestant churches think the corpus on the cross is a graven image that is worshipped. I actually had two different people, involved in a wedding, who refused to bow before the altar over which hung a cross with Christ on it because they said, “I do not worship an idol.” The “Protestant Cross,” without the crucifix,

can signify Jesus' resurrection as the cross is empty of any body. The churches that have a crucifix feel that the corpus is a strong reminder of the suffering that took place and shouldn't be left off lest the cross be emptied of its power. Either way the cross is the power of God.

The most common name of this cross is the "Latin" or "Roman Cross" as the Romans commonly used this style of cross for their crucifixions. So demeaning was this cross, and style of execution, Roman citizens would never be condemned to die on a cross.

The cross has two parts. The **stipes** is the vertical part. It normally remained in the ground upright. The horizontal piece, crossbeam, is known as the patibulum. When Jesus carried the cross to Calvary it was probably the **patibulum** that he carried and not the whole cross. The patibulum could have weighed upwards of 100-150 pounds. No wonder Jesus, after being scourged, had trouble carrying it! Above the head was the titulus. The **titulus** (Colossians 2:14) was the sign placed above the crucified victim's head stating the crime the "criminal" had committed. In the case of Jesus it read, "**Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews.**" (John 19:19)

What we want to remember as we Survey the Wondrous cross, during the Lenten Season and always, is what Jesus was willing to do for the whole world: Pay an excruciating price so that all mankind might be freed from their sin. Eloquent words of wisdom won't be used as we don't want to empty the cross of its power and meaning. "**The word/message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are saved it is the power of God.**" Simply said, "**Jesus paid for your sins receiving your punishment as He died on Calvary defeating satan.**"

May the "Cross of Calvary" always be a reminder to you how much God loves you. May the Cross of Calvary bring you comfort and peace, for it is on the cross sin, death, and the devil were crushed and you were set free. Let it be so! Amen!