Take up your Cross

Jesus said “If you want to be my disciple you must take up your cross and follow me”. Today in our Gospel we heard our Lord add to that. “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me”. Christians are choosing to be associated with the community that proclaims the love of God. It is a duty and also a joy, but taking up our cross implies something more testing and demands that we be crucified with Christ if we are to rise with Him. As St Paul puts it, we must die to self so Jesus may live in us. When we see a cross, when we wear a cross, let it remind us to keep the faith. We could use it as a prayer starter to open ourselves through God’s grace to the power of the Holy Spirit so that we become what God calls us to be, to do God’s work on earth.

The order of the day is “Lift high the Cross”. Let everyone see it. Carry the cross boldly, not in shame but with courage. There are some who feel they have plenty of crosses to bear and that isn’t surprising in a world so full of pain and sorrow. But suffering is a two-edged sword. It can lead some to a deeper faith, while others will doubt and even lose their faith. We as Christians are called to witness that the cross is a sign of life restored and not life destroyed. We are the Easter people. The cross is a sign of God’s immeasurable love for us as well as a sign that He grieves for us in our pain, because He, through His Son, also knows what it is to suffer. We are to be witnesses to the life-changing power of the cross, to the love of God for all humanity and for all creation.

Being a witness can be a risky business. Many people are afraid to go to a court of law in case the accused takes it out on them later. And being a witness for Christ must also make us careful in our behaviour. If I live badly, people may well judge the church by my actions. The world expects better from someone who proclaims him/herself to be a Christian, and whether or not we wear a cross we are still called to live according to the Gospel that the cross symbolises. We are called to live our lives not just for ourselves but for Christ’s sake.

Yes, it is odd that God chose a way of painful suffering as the way to life and salvation. It is hard to grasp, yet we can’t avoid it and we can be thankful for it when we face the reality and the mystery of suffering in this world and in our lives. God didn’t avoid suffering and through it He gives us His life and His love.

We should remember the cross every day of our lives, every moment of each day, and when we can no longer remember we can ask with H.F. Lyte “Hold though thy cross before my closing eyes. Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies”. When we are tired or discouraged, look at the cross. When we wonder if the effort of being a Christian is worth it, look at the cross. When we wonder if God loves us, look at the cross and be reminded of the one to whom we belong, and who loves us more than we can ask for or imagine. If we carry the cross, it will carry us.