



For the past six summers we have had a week long summer Bible Camp for the young children of the parish. One of the activities that are done is the scavenger hunt in the Church, the children are divided into groups and given a series of items to discover such as: where is the holy water font, where is the infant Jesus statue, where is the Blessed Mother picture and so on. It is a practice that the kids enjoy. I was thinking that if one of the questions was how many crosses and crucifixes are in the church that would be a difficult question to answer. We immediately think of the beautiful resurrection cross about the altar, the striking carved image of the crucified

Jesus near the altar; but don't miss that each station of the cross has a cross, that we have two processional crosses, that we have 9/11 cross and I am sure there are many others. I think of the great consolation that the recovery workers had at ground zero when they found mangled steel beams that were in the form of a cross. As the recovery went on, it became a place of prayer, of blessing, and consolation for those seeking to recover the lost remains of those who had died. The cross is a most powerful Christian symbol.

I remember taking a course many years ago on liturgy. The professor asked us a question: should we use a crucifix or cross for our Good Friday services. I raised my hand and said it should be a crucifix. I said that the body of Jesus on the cross was a very powerful image of our Lord's suffering and death. The professor gently told me I was wrong; he went on to explain that the cross that we venerate and kiss today at our Good Friday service is the better symbol. Jesus is not on the cross at this time. Our Lord is now sitting at the right hand of the Father and risen in glory. We, the people of the past, the present, and the future are on the cross. We are the people who are suffering and pain: a man dying slowly of bone cancer, a parent burying her daughter who died of an opioid addiction, a refugee fleeing war or poverty, a couple enduring a bitter divorce, a lonely widow grieving for her spouse, a bullied child who sits alone in the lunchroom, a victim of a clergy sexual abuse, a starving child, a heart filled with anger and resentment, envy or greed, a person walking in the darkness of depression or mental illness, and the litany goes on. We are now on the cross of Christ.

We are not masochists. Christians do not embrace or love pain or suffering. We do not choose the burden and sometimes find it unbearable to carry at times. We want to cry out with Jesus, *My God, My God, why have you abandoned me*. We may want to cry to God with Old Testament Job and demand that God tell us why we suffer. But it seems his voice is silent to us as it was to Jesus who clung to his firm belief that *I am the Beloved son of God. Although all my apostles and friends have left, I believe he is with me*. The Emmanuel of Christmas, God with us, remains true to the words of Jesus, it is finished.

So, we come forward today and in awe and reverence to kiss the cross. We do this because we know God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not die, but have eternal life. Every cross is sacred because it shakes our soul with the reality of the love of God.

We come forward to kiss the cross as a response to our own suffering. The cross may be on shoulders today, or may be in time to come. But we know it is unavoidable. As we kiss the cross, this ritual is our response in faith that God will not abandon us. When we are on the cross, when are in pain or suffer, he is with us.

Elie Wiesel tells a story of the death camp of Auschwitz that describes this reality. He speaks of a time when the Nazi guards randomly lined up ten prisoners to hang since someone had tried to escape. One of them was a small boy or age five of six. All the prisoners of the camp were made to watch this horror. The nine adults died quickly. The boy because he was thin did not. He hung in agony, gasping and crying for breathe. Wiesel says it was the darkest of so many brutal experiences. A voice from one of the prisoners say with bitterness, *where is God?* The only sounds are that of those of dying child. Then another prisoner points to the child, and says, *God is right there with the boy*. This faith in that promise is way we kiss the cross of Christ.