

Encouragement Encouragement

September 2016 – Issue 62

Exalt the Cross – It is a sign of Victory

This is written for all those, the many, who feel worthless, unloved, unwanted and for whom ministry of any kind or service of any kind, feels impossible. It is for those who feel powerless and forgotten – for those whose life has been fraught, and either fear or guilt prevents them from reaching out to others and being a true witness of God's love and mercy. It is for those who feel too ashamed or inadequate to proclaim the Gospel of Good News or who, as yet have not experienced His overwhelming love, especially for sinners, the broken, the disheartened or wounded and who stay with walls of security and therefore do not fulfil their destiny as Children of God, the beloved children of a loving Father and of the Kingdom of God.

Over my life I have seen God do amazing things, with and for people, with 'amazing grace'. Broken hearts have been healed, broken bodies repaired, families reconciled. I have seen relationships with Jesus restored and peoples' lives changed. Yet one thing continues to puzzle and concern me, and that is why so many, having received so much, do not go on to serve others, and shout aloud, proclaim what God has done for them.

Of course, there are many who do and whose witness is transparent – we have many sinners who become saints whose lives took a different turn – but all too few become living witnesses of the truth of God's unfailing love. There are those who, while grateful, remain in the shadows not wanting to raise their heads above the parapet for fear of being shot down by self-righteous people. Some continue to serve in small ways and of course they can be applauded for this. We are not always aware of the effect we have on others.

Yet I remain troubled by the lack of commitment to shout aloud in word, action or service what God has done for us all.



In listening to, and reading of many testimonies of those who step out of their comfort zone, I have become increasingly aware that many people speak out and proclaim, men and women, who come to this point through *brokenness, error, sin and victimhood*. These are a living proof of what God can, and does, do. Having received so many blessings they continue giving back so much. Examples are such as Joyce Meyer, Linda Grant, author of 'A voice for the voiceless' and thousands of others who have served. We have parents who have lost a child and raised money to help others, we have those recovering from sickness who do the same. But there are two stories to tell, the works of God, Jesus the Redeemer and those of man, human stories. In every life, these two come together but the ownership of these is often neglected to the detriment of many who need to hear the Good News.

We do not have to look far to see many examples of what God has done through and for people who have been failures in human eyes, or sinners. The Gospels are full of such: St. Peter, St. Paul, Mary Magdalene, Matthew the tax collector, etc. etc. There is no doubt either about Jesus' desire to be with sinners and bring them to His healing heart. He makes this so clear in His message. He supped with sinners and forgave many their faults and mistakes, restoring them to life. He made it clear that His mission was to redeem people from sin, and that Heaven rejoices over one repentant sinner- more than over the righteous; this desire to redeem, to bring back, to keep safe for the Father is exemplified on the Cross. We use words such as 'Redeemer', 'Saviour', without perhaps truly reflecting on the meaning. By dying so ignominiously, so shamefully, on the Cross He paid for us 'so to speak' and bought us back to full life. The people who were, and are, set free to live fruitfully and not held by sin.

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The Triumph of the Cross is just that. By the Cross we are able to reject sin and walk a straight path knowing that we are graced people because of Jesus' action. Jesus used an instrument of shame and turned it into a sign of great Victory.

Just as He triumphed over the devil in the wilderness, so He triumphed over Death and sin through the Cross. Who better than those who experience this rebirth in forgiveness and grace to proclaim God's mercy and kindness?

We often think that the Saints, who seem to be forever recounting their sins and faults, are to be mocked or to be seen as exaggerating things, but they are often the ones who have received such grace and forgiveness that they need to proclaim it to all.

Great Saints become so humbled by God's actions that they claim nothing for themselves.

Yet these living witnesses have a hard time, very often, in being accepted by those who, unlike the Father, think more about 'the sin' than the fact that they have repented. They think more of their own self-righteousness than of the graces received by others. I remember with horror my own reaction to someone witnessing to conversion and returning to faith, who was a convicted killer, and my own rather sanctimonious attitude.

Two Gospels remind us in a vivid way of how Jesus perceived His right to offer forgiveness and justice, and His right to grant it in whatever way He wished. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20, 1-16) being one and the response to the question of the disciples 'who is going to be saved?' (Luke 13, 22-30) is the other. Both end with the statement '**The last will be first and the first last**'. These are very salutary words, or should be.

How often do we keep in mind the sins of others and keep ours at arm's length? We also distance ourselves from perceived sinners. How often do we say 'Once a.... always a' We can put in the sins ourselves. Surely this is contrary to God's ability to restore, let alone save. How easy it is stand in judgment over a person who may have broken 'the rules' or acted in an unorthodox way, or even truly be at fault, and pass judgment, and refuse to let them

be justified by God's Forgiveness and Mercy.

I wonder if this is because we like to think of ourselves as better than that, and perhaps refusing to see ourselves as we really are...

Their desire for change and repentance, making good, is a call to us, which we would rather not face.

Their change of heart, a confrontation.

One of the last actions Jesus performed from the Cross was to forgive the repentant thief and guarantee him salvation. Surely this should be sufficient for us as sign that we should give people space for change and rejoice with them when it has been achieved. Such as these often bear fantastic witness to the truth of God's love. We must enable and empower them to do so as they are witnesses to this essential truth.

Yes the Cross is a triumph.

Yes, the last will be first.

Halina Holman

Pope Francis and The Cross

We look upon the Cross, the story of mankind and the story of God. We look upon this Cross, where you can try that honey of aloe, that bitter honey, that bitter sweetness of the sacrifice of Jesus. Despite the fact that humanity sinned, God chose to "take up the story" of mankind, "to journey with us." The incarnation of the Son of God brought salvation through a different kind of tree: the wood of the Cross. This tree of the Cross saves us, all of us, from the consequences of that other tree, where self-sufficiency, arrogance, the pride of us wanting to know all things according to our own mentality, according to our own criteria, and also according to that presumption of being and becoming the only judges of the world. In the Cross we find both the sweetness of God's love in redeeming us, and the bitterness of his suffering and death due to sin. This bittersweet reality is a mystery, which can only be understood, a little bit, by kneeling, in prayer, but also through tears.

Moreover, each of us must be aware of the cry of our brothers and sisters who are looking upon so much human misery.

Radio Vatican, Sept. 2013

Feasts in September:

3rd St. Gregory the Great

8th Birth of Our Lady

13th St. John Chrysostom

14th Exaltation of the Holy Cross

15th Our Lady of Sorrows

16th St. Ninian

21st St. Matthew the Apostle

23rd St. Pio of Pietrelcina

24th Our Lady of Ransom, Walsingham

29th Ss. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael Archangels

30th St. Jerome



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