

Feast of the Holy Cross

Year C, 2025

Num 21:4b-9

Phil 2:6-11

Ps 78

Jn 3:11-17

Meditations on the holy Cross

On this feast day of the holy cross, when we commemorate the historical finding of the true cross in Jerusalem, I propose to offer four brief meditations on the cross, drawn from scripture and from Catholic tradition. The thoughts I share with you today you may well interpret and understand in light of the social, cultural, and political turmoil now facing our country, for that is my intention.

I have in mind two things in particular, the very recent murder of a politically conservative commentator and activist in Utah, and the only slightly less recent murder and attempted murder of politically liberal politicians in Minnesota. The big news, of course, is that Charlie Kirk was murdered earlier this week. But how is it that many people seem to be unaware that just three months ago in June Minnesota state representative Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark were murdered in their home by a politically-motivated assassin, a man who had also gunned down and attempted to murder state senator John Hoffman and his wife Yvette? Charlie Kirk was not a bad guy. Neither were the Hortmans or Hoffmans bad people. They were all married, with children, and seem to be decent, law-abiding, civically-engaged people. None of them deserved to die as they did. All of them should be mourned, and remembered, and honored, and prayed for.

And yet, I find myself disappointed and my heart heavy at the politically divisive reactions of some, even some Christians, to these two events, occurring only months apart. Here in deeply “red” Louisiana, I am distressed by the very apparent ignorance of or indifference to the assassination of Democratic lawmakers in Minnesota. “For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?” (Lk 6:32a, 33a). I can only hope that some brother priest of mine, living in a deeply “blue” state, is pointing out something similar to his congregation, and telling them, as I have told you before: we are not sick *of* politics, we are sick *with* politics. Political polarization drives us apart, and we revel in it, playing the blame game of who did what first, as if this were some kind of justification. But this is diabolical, the work of the evil one. Woe to anyone who aids and abets the devil in his works and in his empty show. Lord, have mercy on us, for, by sinning against each other, we have sinned against you.

Our first meditation on the cross comes from the Latin motto, *stat crux dum volvitur orbis* – “the cross stands while the world turns.” The world whirls around at breakneck speed, with all its noisy commotion, its hustle and bustle, with wanton disregard for what makes for true peace (Lk 19:42), producing spiritual nausea and disorientation. The logic of the world brings forth its fruits: iniquity, injustice, clamor, hatred, violence. As the world spins, it produces upheaval and vomits out filth.

When our bodies are racked with nausea, we can hardly move, we can hardly think clearly, we can hardly act with right judgment or deliberate intention. We are to a large degree paralyzed, tortured by internal physical upheavals that will find no relief until the sick is expelled from our bodies.

But when we suffer from spiritual nausea, the body may appear whole and sound, but the mind and the heart are churning and become disoriented and unmoored from reality. This spiritual sickness we can carry around in us with all the *appearance* of normalcy until we ourselves finally fall victim to the internal turmoil produced by spiritual nausea produced by the world's dizzying convulsions. The *appearance* of decency and normalcy, until ... until spiritual nausea unexpectedly expels its filth: in harsh judgments, in feverish and hateful words, in violent actions. The convulsive eruptions of spiritual nausea are shocking, dismaying, disturbing, and mostly because the symptoms can be so hidden, so well disguised under the appearance of civility and even piety, that is, until they burst forth.

The anchor, the place of refuge and relief, for spiritual nausea is the cross. The cross stands while the world spins. The cross stands firm while the world lies infirm. The cross is a refuge from the refuse of the world. The solidity, the unassailability of the cross is relief from the world's instability and unsteadiness. Contemplating the meaning of the cross, we must learn to detect within ourselves the first signs of spiritual nausea – confusion, resentment, obsession,

fixation, contempt, despair – and immediately seek the cross as a remedy and refuge before the nausea overcomes us.

Our second meditation on the cross is taken from the Good Friday liturgy, *ave crux, spes unica* – “hail, O cross, our only hope.” What a seeming paradox, that the cross, an instrument of cruelty and death, is a sign, the only sign, the only assurance of true hope!

For what do we hope? This is a question that we should meditate on frequently. We hope to be free of all suffering; we hope to enjoy good health and to be happy; we hope to have ease of being. In a word, we hope for peace, in our bodies, in our hearts, in our psyches. We long for peace in our homes and in our families. We want harmony and amity in all our affairs, in our community, our state, our nation, and among the nations of the world.

To whom do we turn, from whom can we hope to have all that we hope for? Sadly, we put our hope, our trust, our confidence in things that cannot satisfy, in persons who cannot deliver. The scriptures warn us about this:

Not in my bow do I trust, nor does my sword bring me victory
(Ps 44:7).

Put no trust in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no help.
(Ps 146:3).

Ultimately, we hope for things that this world cannot give, chiefly among them peace. Did Jesus not tell his disciples: “Peace I leave

with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you” (Jn 14:27)? We cannot enter into his peace, we cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven, until we stop turning to the world and asking it for things it cannot give. The world does not have peace; therefore, it cannot give peace. Hope in the world, trust in princes, politicians, or pundits is an exercise in vanity, futility, and perhaps even idolatry. Yes, perhaps even idolatry.

The cross is our only hope, because it alone is the source of mercy, deliverance, reconciliation, unity, and peace.

Our third meditation on the cross, on reconciliation, is taken from Paul’s letter to the Colossians – *For in Christ Jesus the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether those on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross* (Col 2:19-20).

Here we come face to face with the work of the cross, with its triumph, with the reason for its exaltation. Through Jesus, through his dying on the cross, God reconciles all things to himself. All things – the material and the spiritual, the things of men and those of angels – all things are reconciled to God through Jesus, by his death on the cross.

Now that which is united does not need to be reconciled, but only that which is in disunity, in opposition. There is no need for reconciliation with friends, but with enemies. Reconciliation is

necessary between those who are in opposition to one another, those who are separated (see Lk 6:35-36).

Whatever the nature of any particular opposition, separation, or enmity, its root and origin is to be found in sin, and all sin can be traced back to that first and original sin, which was the sin of rebellious opposition to the will of God. At the moment of the first sin, separation from God ensued, and all the evils of the world followed after.

In this understanding, the cross represents the wickedness of rebellion, separation, opposition. And by dying on the cross, Jesus baptizes the cross with his blood, washes it clean. Jesus reconciles the cross – here understood to be all that is in opposition to God – to the Father, baptizing it with his blood, removing its sin and rebellion, returning it to obedience and holiness and freedom.

The human race had made itself an enemy to God, and yet while we were still enemies with him, at war against him, God reconciled us to himself through Jesus. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17). This is divine righteousness, that God shows mercy to sinners, reconciles them to himself and to one another. St Paul reflects upon this *crucial* work of reconciliation in his letter to the Romans (5:10-11), where he points out that we must boast of God for his work of righteousness, how he reconciles sinners, and all creation, to himself, “making peace by the blood of [the] cross.” “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord

Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).

Our fourth and final meditation on the cross, on unity, is taken from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians – *For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh ... that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it* (2:14-16).

The theme of unity is inseparably connected with the theme of reconciliation. In this passage, St Paul is pointing out that two opposing groups, the Jews and the Gentiles, are made one in Christ. Through the flesh of Jesus, who dies upon the cross, the one body of Christ reconciles all humanity, both Jews and Gentiles to the Father, who then come the one body of Christ.

The hostility and opposition that exists between people, whether man and woman, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, this, too, is reconciled by the cross, in the body of Jesus, for all are one in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:22b; Gal 3:28). And we are again made one, according to God’s original plan, destined to live in “the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as [we] were called to the one hope of [our] call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:3-6).

Through the cross, God has put to death enmity and hostility, opposition and antagonism. Through the cross, we are restored to our original unity, since we all have this in common – we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Through the cross, God sets aside all differences among us and gathers all together to deal with us according to what we have in common – the fact that we are sinners. All other differences, all other sources of discrimination and recrimination are obliterated, so that God's righteousness and holiness may be made manifest as he unites sinners to himself and to one another, reconciling them, making them holy.

The cross takes away sin and restores grace. The cross makes each person one with Christ. The cross makes each one of us one with each other in Christ. Opponents, enemies are made one by the cross, their opposition overcome, their enmity defeated. Think about that: the people we most despise and want nothing to do with because they are our total social, political, cultural, ethnic, economic opposites, we will be one with them and they with us. By the cross, the unity of humankind is restored in Christ Jesus: unity, the result of reconciliation; unity, the maker of peace.

So, you see, the cross is our refuge. The cross is our hope. The cross is our reconciliation. The cross is our unity.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.