

## THE CROSS IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

by Jerry Johnson

We all face different crosses each day in our lives. What are these crosses? Where do they come from and how do we deal with them as Christians? Does our faith make a difference? To begin to answer these questions, let's first take a look at our crosses. Some may be small inconveniences, but some may be extremely difficult hardships in our lives. They may be physical, emotional or even spiritual.

We may suffer from a severe or debilitating illness or handicap. We may have to deal with emotional or mental illness. We all experience crosses at times in our relationships with family, friends or coworkers. It may be an unruly toddler or a difficult teenager. Sometimes the crosses are overwhelming. Where do these crosses come from? Are we at fault? Possibly. Some of our crosses may come from our own sin, but certainly not always. Sometimes they are the result of another's sin or even an accident or natural disaster. Jesus was asked whether a man's blindness was the result of the man's or his parent's sin. He said neither one. He explained that others who suffered from an accident or catastrophe were no greater sinners than anyone else. (Luke 13:1-5) It may even be that God has sent us a particular cross; "for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines". (Heb 12:6)

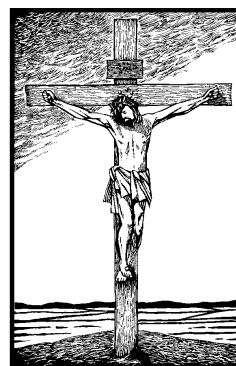
There may always be a certain element of mystery in the source of the cross in our lives, but the question then becomes; how do we deal with our cross and does our faith in Jesus make a difference? Jesus' command was to take up our cross and follow him. What example did

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 16:24

he then give for us to follow? We will focus on the final and

greatest cross that Christ faced in his life. The cross of Calvary. The very first thing that he did when he knew the time had come to face this cross was to go to the Father in prayer. A prayer so intense that he sweat blood in the garden at Gethsemane. His initial prayer was a very human response to his impending suffering. He prayed that the Father spare him this trial. We also need to go to prayer in the midst of our cross. Is this a cross that the Father wants us to bear? It may be that He wants to give us relief or ease our pain. We can pray for that, but in the end our response should be as Christ's; "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)



He then accepted the cross. He took up and endured the cross, bearing with great suffering and pain. Along the way he accepted help. Help in carrying the cross, help in the form of consolation from others and as Veronica wiped his face. We too may be offered help with our crosses as we take them up. God will send the help we need to endure. What will always give us the strength to bear our crosses, large and small, is our faith in Christ. The faith that there can be meaning and purpose in the cross. That our cross may be there to strengthen our faith, to discipline us and make us holy. (see page 2) In the words of Father John Corapi "There is merit in the struggle". Amazingly, the cross can also bring us joy. How can this be?

The beatitudes speak of the blessedness or happiness of those who mourn or are persecuted. Those who seek and thirst. (see Corapi story pg. 2) Again, how can this be? As the Lord responded to St. Paul's prayer to remove the thorn from his flesh; "my grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9) It is all grace. In grace, the cross can ultimately lead to resurrection. It may be the resurrection of a physical healing or the healing of relationships. It may be the resurrection of a grown and mature child or a spiritual healing. There can be *redemption* in our suffering; a deep seated *joy* in the midst of our pain; there is *merit* in the struggle! In Christ and through him all things are possible and as we

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offer up and unite our cross to his "We know that *all* things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose". (Rom 8:28)

Jesus suffered the cross out of love for the Father and love for us even to the point of offering forgiveness to those who caused his pain. When he spoke from the cross the words "Father forgive them for they know not what they do", he was asking forgiveness for all of us. Our sin was the reason for his cross, the reason

for his suffering. We can only come to imitate Christ when we are in Christ. On our own we can do nothing. But through our Baptism, our repentance and in prayer and sacrament we enter into the life of Christ. We enter into his grace. Take hold of that grace and then take up your cross and follow him in love and forgiveness!

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"We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."  
Romans 8:28

**THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS**

1. How do you deal with the crosses in your life?
2. Do you take your crosses to prayer and rely on the sacraments to help you imitate Christ's example?

**Sacred Scripture**

"As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." -John 9:1-3

"At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them --do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" -Luke 13:1-5

"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges." Endure your trials as "discipline"; God treats you as sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?...At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it." -Hebrews 12:5-11

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church,..." -Colossians 1:24

".... Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,..." -2 Corinthians 12:7-9

"Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." -James 1:2-4

"For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God." -Heb 12:2

**FATHER CORAPI**

Father John Corapi relates the story of his good friend from the seminary: He and David often discussed the meaning behind the illnesses that were hampering their seminary studies. If God wanted them to become priests, why were they experiencing so much difficulty and pain, which sometimes prevented them from keeping up with their studies. They eventually came to the conclusion that some better good would come from these crosses in their lives. David's illness became

terminal and he suffered greatly. The last time that Father Corapi saw him, he was in the hospital, emaciated and less than 100 pounds. The pain medication was no longer effective and sweat was pouring from his face. As he lay in his mother's arms, Father Corapi envisioned the pieta, a vision of Christ in his mother's arms. David could barely whisper, so he motioned for Father to come closer. As he leaned over his friend he heard his faint voice say these final words to

him; "you can't believe the joy, you can't believe the joy!" The nun who was caring for David told Father of the last moments of his life. He lay in a coma as a priest lifted the Eucharist to bless him. Then he sat bolt upright out of the coma and was able to receive a small piece of the host. "Viaticum", food for the journey. He exclaimed alleluia, alleluia, alleluia and laid back down and breathed his last.