

**Paradox of the Paschal Mystery**      **The Exaltation of the Holy Cross**      Monday,  
September 14, 2015 8:15 AM Nm 21:4b-9; Phil 2:6-11; Jn 3:13-17 (Life and death  
are really part of a process, a wholly good process, that contains a certain amount of doubt,  
uncertainty, and pain.)

Today we celebrate the feast of the **Triumph of the Cross, and that is intentionally ironic.** Triumph and Cross: it is at the center of our faith, and it is the paradox of the Paschal Mystery. “He who gains the world but loses life” versus “the one who loses life and gains.” So we have to think about what we are losing, what we are gaining. What is this mystery of the Cross? First of all, we have to keep in mind the mystery of the Cross involves and includes the resurrection. So we can’t think of the Cross all by itself; it involves the resurrection. **The Paschal Mystery is death and life, especially as seen in the life of Jesus in his death and in his resurrection.**

So what does this reveal? Well, it reveals something about the world that we can’t figure out on our own. First of all, when bad things happen to people, they have different ways of dealing with this. Either it’s bad luck or someone is against them. That someone is either God, who is in charge of everything in some people’s understanding; or the devil; or the gods, who are either capricious or malicious depending on your viewpoint, but surely not benevolent; or bad things wouldn’t happen. So this is **a great crisis that people have in their religious life when things aren’t going well.** When things are going well, of course, then they simply praise God for how well everything is, and how well they are doing, happily, and that’s that. There’s no more question.

**Everyone’s life is touched by some kind of evil,** sometimes deep, sometimes profound. And **how do we explain it?** Even if you know that it was because your child was murdered by somebody and you actually know who it was, but how could God allow that? So **it always gets back to something bigger than just us human beings:** the way the world is, which is not really something we have made.

Jesus’ answer to all this is that **God is good,** wholly good. God isn’t good to some and bad to others. He is good **to everyone, even evil people.** That was Jesus’ view. That was not a view of other Jews of his time that God is good even to evil people. But Jesus said, “The sun shines on the good and the bad; the rain falls on the just and the unjust.” God is good.

**Why is there evil in the world? Well, God’s goodness also allows freedom, not only for people, but for angels, spirits; and the spirits have a great deal to do with human life.** Eliminating this from the New Testament would strip it of a whole level of meaning. For example, the Letter to the Hebrews says, “The devil kept the world in bondage by the fear of death.” That’s directly related to this Paschal Mystery. **If we are afraid of dying,** then it turns out **we become afraid to live,** because **life and death are really part** of the same thing. They are part **of a process,** a wholly good process **that contains a certain amount of doubt, uncertainty, and pain.**

**So Jesus is the Word of God; who comes into the world to embrace life in its totality,** including its doubt, its uncertainty and its pain, not to undergo some punishment. That

theological explanation is lame because it makes God subject to some law beyond himself, which is impossible; or makes him an ogre. So both are not acceptable and don't fit into Jesus' general teaching about the goodness of God and the mercy of God, and so on.

So we have to see this from Jesus' human viewpoint that **he has come to accept life totally whatever it brings. He speaks the truth; the truth makes him free, but it also kills him.** That's part of the paradox of life. Yes, he was totally free, but also it killed him. It killed him because **there were people that didn't want freedom.** There were politicians, religious leaders, military leaders in the Roman Empire, that didn't want freedom—not for those people, only for themselves. And there were even religious people at Jesus time who didn't want freedom from what they believed to be true, a God who did certain things and acted in certain ways and who had already rested, who had already completed his work. They didn't want to change because they thought changing would involve them in error. **So for various reasons, some really sincere, Jesus had to be eliminated.** That's the story; **that's why Jesus died on the Cross.**

The point is that because Jesus really was free and because he really did believe in the Father and because he really totally surrendered himself to the Father and didn't allow any of his feelings or his experiences to block his belief in God, and his belief in the goodness of God, and the love of God, **he became the source of life for everyone.** We all now can have life as he did, as he does.

But faith is absolutely essential. **We have to actually believe in what he taught, not just in him, but in what he taught as well: in the goodness of God, in the goodness of life.** We have to commit ourselves to it, and **we have to commit ourselves to freeing others** from the burdens of ignorance and darkness as he did. In other words, **he has called us to be coworkers,** not only to free us, but **to free us for something,** to be something, to do something with our lives, something godly, **something divine.** It's the greatest possible reason to live. It brings with it **the promise that we will be raised up and live eternally with God and in God.** And that **already begins now through our faith and in our sacramental life.** Baptism introduces us; Eucharist nurtures us. Every sacrament expresses some aspect of this great mystery. So we come to the triumph of the Cross, the victory of death that brings real life to the earth.