

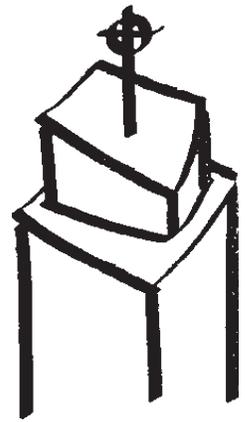
OUR FAMILY



NEWS

For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

March &
April, 2013



The following homily was preached by Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B., at conventual Mass on Easter Sunday morning, 2001. Untarnished in its brilliance and undiminished in its relevance, it remains a more than remarkable exploration and explication of all that Christ has accomplished for us by means of the cross: complete reconciliation, both with God and with one another.

A HOMILY FOR EASTER

Acts 10:34.37-43; Col 3:1-4; Jn 20:1-9

On Good Friday, when we listened to the proclamation of the passion story, we heard at the very end the words: *Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden...so they laid Jesus there* (Jn 19:41-42). In the gospel for Easter Sunday morning we find ourselves again in that garden, first with Mary of Magdala, and then with Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Only the fourth gospel says that the place of Jesus' crucifixion and burial was a garden, and thus the evangelist subtly reminds us of that garden in which the biblical story began in the book of Genesis: the garden of Eden. We are back in the garden; the story of salvation has come full circle.



What stands in the Bible between these two scenes that take place in a garden is the entire account of human history that fills the Old Testament, that whole story of human weakness and perversity and evil that strove mightily to nullify the creative intention of God. It reached its climax in the cross, when human pride rebuffed God's noblest and most generous gesture on our behalf—the sacrifice of his own Son—and crucified its Savior. *But*, as St. Paul says, *the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength* (1 Cor 1:25). So *God has made the wisdom of the world foolish*, and while the cross may seem foolish *to those who are perishing, to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1:20.18).

It may seem paradoxical to speak of the cross on the day of the resurrection. Does it not rather belong to Good Friday? But for the Church the cross is now the symbol of triumph and glory. We are acutely conscious of the contrast between Lent and Paschal tide, between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We should be equally conscious, however, of the continuity between Holy Week and Easter, the cross and the resurrection. On Good Friday we already celebrated the outcome of Jesus' passion, for after singing, "Body of Christ given up on the cross, broken and nail-pierced: crucified Love!" we immediately added, "Body of Christ risen glorious from death, bringing us new life: Heart of the world!" When we think of the cross, we usually have in mind the familiar crucifix, with its image of the suffering Jesus with twisted limbs and contorted features, scourged, crowned with thorns, pierced with a lance. But the cross that we venerated on Good Friday and that we honor today is now a symbol of what the Lord accomplished by his suffering, and is therefore a sign of victory and glory.

It is remarkable that when the earliest preachers of the gospel referred to the crucifixion, they never said that Jesus was hanged upon a cross, but always "upon a tree." In today's first reading Peter says: *They put him to death by hanging him on a tree* (Acts 10:39; cf. 5:30, 13:29; 1 Pt 2:24). The Greek word for "tree" can also mean wood or anything made of wood, but its usage by the New Testament is a reference to a passage from Dt 21:23, cited by Paul in Gal 3:13, which speaks of "hanging on a tree" in connection with an execution. There is now evidence from Qumran that this hanging on a tree was already understood in Jewish circles to refer to crucifixion. The early Christians, therefore, reading that Jesus was nailed

to a tree in a garden, immediately associated this with the tree of life in the garden of Eden. There Adam had eaten the bitter fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and thus excluded himself and all his descendants from life.



At last the new Adam has again provided us with access to the tree of life, which is none other than that blessed tree on which he hung in agony, and from which flowed the streams of blood and water that nourish and vivify all who drink of them. The cross has become a glorious source of life for all who believe. Eve was driven

from the garden so that she could no longer reach the tree of life, but in the new Eden Mary of Magdala finds the tree that provides true life. This is the tree of Psalm 1 and of Ezekiel's vision (Ez 47:12), planted by running waters, which the Fathers see as representing the cleansing streams of baptism. The tree bears the fruit that gives eternal life to those who eat of it, those of whom the book of Revelation says, *To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God* (Rev 2:7).

So the cross is a sign of the power of the risen Christ working in the Church. But it is even more than that. Already in the second century, St. Irenaeus showed how the glorious cross extends the life-giving power of the risen Lord not only to the Church, but to the whole universe. When he stretched out his hands on the cross, Irenaeus says, Jesus invited and brought together in that welcoming gesture the two peoples that had previously been at enmity, the Jews and the Gentiles (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 34), so that, as Ephesians says, *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* (Eph 2:15-16). Moreover, according to Irenaeus, "as we lost the Word by means of a tree, by means of a tree has he again become manifest to all, showing the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth in himself" (*ibid.*).

Here he is commenting on another text of Ephesians, 3:18. Irenaeus conceives of two walls of separation imprisoning the human race. One is a vertical wall that separates Jews from Gentiles and produces hostility among us. The other is a horizontal wall that divides the world below from the world above. By his cross Christ has destroyed both walls and thus restored unity in a twofold sense. The enmity that divides us from one another and the enmity that divides us from God have both been swept away. The extent of his love is unlimited: “By the obedience that he practiced unto death hanging on the tree, he undid the old disobedience occasioned by the tree.... His invisible presence is spread abroad in us and fills the whole world; he extends his influence in the world through its length, breadth, height, and depth” (*ibid.*). Irenaeus is thinking further of Col 1:20: [It pleased the Father] *through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven.*



The blood of the cross has distilled into the brilliant jewels that gleam on the golden surface of this glorious symbol. The wood of the cross is the tree of life. Its four branches extend to all who are *in heaven and on earth and under the earth* (Phil 2:10). The folly of the cross has become the truest wisdom. The Lord is truly risen, my brothers and sisters, and everything has changed. We have been raised with Christ. Therefore fix your gaze on the glory of his cross. *Seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you too have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory* (Col 3:1-4).

---Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B.

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Our Family News is published in the special interest of the oblates of St. Bede Abbey. Please send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey, 24 W US Highway 6, Peru, IL 61354.

We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights to choose material for publication and to edit as necessary.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the abbey church from 1:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2013

Sunday, April 14, 2013

Sunday, May 5, 2013

Passage for Lectio at the March Meeting

The Rock--how faultless are his deeds,
how right all his ways!
A faithful God, without deceit,
how just and upright he is!

You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you,
you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Dt 32:4.18

Abbey Prayer Schedule

Visitors are welcome to join the monks for Mass and for the hours of the Divine Office. Conventual Mass is celebrated on the first level of the abbey church, the hours of the Divine Office on the second level. During the school year, the monks' schedule is as follows.

6:00 A.M. Morning Prayer*

12:00 Noon Midday Prayer

5:00 P.M. Conventual Mass**

7:20 P.M. Evening Prayer***

* on Sunday, 7:00 A.M.

** on Sunday, 10:00 A.M. and on Monday, 7:30 A.M.

*** on Sunday, 5:30 P.M.



Passage for Lectio at the April Meeting

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David: such is my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory. This saying is trustworthy:

If we have died with him,
we shall also live with him;
if we persevere,
we shall also reign with him.
But if we deny him,
he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny himself.

2 Tim 2:8-13

Copies of these passages will be available at the meetings.