

It is an amazing thing about Christianity that, for the most part, we no longer seem to be able to see that ubiquitous and most dramatic of all Christian symbols, the crucifix. We have seen it as atonement to the Father for the evils of humanity. It has been seen as a price paid, a sacrifice on our behalf to buy back our innocence. We have revered, rather than identified with, the suffering figure portrayed. The depiction of God as a Father who demands the bloody death of His own Son has not, for some strange reason, seemed to disturb us unduly.

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Evil is reduced to silence by the cross. It has no answer to love. Love confounds its logic. Death now owns, “a wasted kingdom.”⁽²⁵⁾ In the home, in the workplace, in the international forum only love can break the self-perpetuating cycles of accusation, counter-accusation, bitterness and recrimination. Only love can make the leap to reconciliation and healing. The great symbol of such love is the cross. It is the very same love which holds us in being and which is continually on offer to us.

Symbol of Cosmic transformation

It was love not duty that led Jesus to the cross and His suffering there is also our suffering. Here, once again, we have to return to the incarnation for its meaning to be made clear. The promises of the Old Testament and God’s offer of relationship reach breathtaking eloquence and poignancy and are given flesh in the person of a suffering Jesus Christ. The cross is the sign of Jesus’ love for the Father and for humanity past, present and future. The resurrection is the Father’s return of that love because the Father, as Jesus knew, is love.

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Passion, death and resurrection are one moment, one all-embracing reality. Jesus’ outstretched arms enfold all of creation. He is a cosmic Christ and in him, death and evil, pain and suffering are overcome on the cross, if not explained. Even so, we are left awestruck and speechless, just as Job was. Mute we may be, but, Calvary is the, “meaning, the one event of all history ⁽²¹⁾” and we are drawn into that event in our baptism and in our celebration of the eucharist. Our lives as Christians are a participation in Calvary and a further unfolding of its meaning.