

EASTER 7A

Jesus asks us to take up our cross. Peter has learned this from hard experience. He says: 'if you have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, because future glory awaits you. However, there is no more unwelcome message in the modern age than to be told to 'take up our cross' and follow Him.

Everyone wants to shed their Cross, dump it, hide it, cure it, take it out, but not carry it. Many people go to healing services for the express purpose of shedding their cross and they think there is something wrong with the healer when nothing happens. What is wrong, they ask, why should I have to suffer? I'm no worse than anybody else – why should this happen to me. How can God be a good God and let this happen. Why does he not intervene to stop it? Is there a God at all? Those questions could easily be our questions.

What is the Cross? Our cross is the whole burden of being a fallible human being in a sinful and sinning world and all the consequences of this. It is the acceptance of oneself and others, warts and all! It is the defects of my character and personality that must be submitted for help, healing and transformation. It involves the whole conglomeration of hurts and sensitive areas due to past experiences that were painful, even painful to remember.

Our cross also comes from other people with whom we live and work. We brush up against their faults and shortcomings and often overlook the fact that they are different from us, in character, personality, upbringing, giftedness, and outlook on life. The cross is the neighbour who came to you when you least expected, and gave you problems you never asked for.

But even on relationships within the family how much suffering can be found! Witness the pain of parents as they agonise over the behaviour of their children. How much heartbreak

there is in the infidelity of a spouse? To be betrayed in love is to be outraged at the core of one's being. Yet millions of adults live with this pain today and their children are often forced to choose between one parent and another. Those who should love them the most break their centre of security in the home. Then there are other crosses. The long illness of a family member, the dreadful tragedy of a life lost due to drugs, suicide or murder, just to name a few.

We, as fellow Christian pilgrims must walk by their side lovingly supportive, listening, praying and compassionately 'being there' for them. We quietly help them to carry their crosses, by imitating Simon of Cyrene who wordlessly helped Jesus carry His dreadful burden to its conclusion on Calvary. However, I don't think it possible to help another person to carry his or her cross if they do not even recognise their own, let alone carry it.

Since this is so, it is now clear why it is a fruitless exercise to try and run away from one's cross, to hide from it or to shed it. To do so is to run away from life, to choose non-life which leads to emotional and spiritual death, refusing to face up to the challenges of living on Planet Earth as a fully alive person, hoping others will follow in your footsteps.