

EASTER 7A

St Peter says: 'if you have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, because future glory awaits you. Jesus asks us to take up our cross. 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?

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. It's all the 'no go' areas that make living with me difficult for others.

Our cross also comes from other people with whom we live and work. We brush up against their faults and failings and fail to realise that others may not be on our wavelength for the simple reason 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 needed it, 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 children also, who are forced to choose between one parent and another when those who loved them 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 the loss of life 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 must allow the sufferer to find their way as we quietly help them to carry their cross, not by being pious, or by being a 'Job's comforter' giving all our theories and reasonings that make no sense in the face of this suffering but 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 their cross if we do not even recognise our 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, and to refuse the challenges of living on Planet Earth as a fully alive person, one who leaves their footprints in the sands of time. Keep safe and God bless.