



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

April 15, 2018, Third Sunday of Easter

The Sixth Stage of Discipleship Formation

We continue working through the stages of discipleship formation. We reflected upon the fifth stage last Sunday: humbly recognizing and accepting that we are all sinners, and the Lord came to call not the righteous but the sinners to repentance and conversion, "for those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do."

The sixth stage of discipleship formation being devoted to the Cross of Christ. The Altar of the Sacrifice, the Key to the Kingdom, the Throne of the Lord: thus is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, embracing a strong devotion to the Cross is absolutely *crucial* ("crucial" from the Latin *crux*, meaning "cross") for any would-be disciple of Jesus Christ who dares to claim the name of Christian. The Cross frightens us perhaps; and yet there can be no path to the Resurrection that does not lead by way of the Cross; thus, no discipleship is possible that attempts to get around the Cross.

The Cross is a *huge* scandal, no doubt about it. After all, the worst criminals of society were who suffered the Cross – and Jesus must have been the *worst* of the worst; after all, not only was He made to suffer the Cross (bad enough as *that* is), but He was made to suffer the mockery of a public trial beforehand, followed by a most brutal and gruesome torture by scouring (which itself probably should have killed Him) and then at last was crucified.

Imagine somebody in our own day and age, innocent and yet unjustly condemned to die by electric chair. A holy person, a great teacher, an innocent victim of grave injustice. Supposing that we were huge fans of this person and grieved terribly at this injustice...would we actually *dare* to be *disciples* of this person, even to carry on this person's work after their public execution? And even supposing that we did *that* much... would we actually go so far as to venerate the electric chair on which that person was murdered?

That is analogous to our Catholic Christian devotion to the Cross of Christ – a stumbling block to some, foolishness to others, but to *us* it is God's wisdom and power. (see 1 Cor 1:24)

Now, as with pretty much *every* devotion in our Catholic Christian playbook, it is not really so much a matter of devotion *to* the Cross as it is devotion *through* the Cross *to* Jesus Christ. We do not love the Cross in and of itself; not the Cross, but rather the Crucified. And just as we Catholic Christians *cannot* and *do* not attempt to separate Christ from His Church (the Bridegroom from His Bride), we cannot and do not attempt to separate the Crucified from His Cross. "Behold the wood of the Cross upon which hung the Salvation of the world! Come, let us adore!" "We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You, for by Your Cross, You have redeemed the world!"

If Christian disciple is fundamentally all about conforming ourselves more and more to the will of God the Son, Jesus Christ...and if that entails us *knowing* Jesus Christ more and more, thus *loving* Him more and more...and if Jesus Christ, the Crucified *cannot* be separated from what He accomplished for us on the Cross...then it stands to reason that Christian discipleship includes devotion to the Cross of the Crucified, so that our holy veneration of the Cross, rather than scandalizing us, would empower us more and more to be like Christ in every way we can.

~ Fr. Lewis