

Bearing

Though I love the benefits of Jesus' cross, I am tempted to hate sharing in that cross with Him. It hurts to bear up under the burden He invites us to shoulder, namely grief over His Church.

During prayer for the healing of our corporate compromises, I realized: what I most value as a Christian—killing sin through swift confession before it kills me, my marriage, or another; living out loud in community in order to grow beyond same-sex attraction into real fruitfulness—is not enough believed or practiced in my Church. For this I suffer, a grief Jesus has invited me to bear. I am not alone but alongside other members who share these values and love the bride enough to grieve too.

This Lent He invited us into a little share of His cross; would we bear this for an hour or so each week in prayer? We discovered we couldn't shake that burden after the meetings ended. It stayed with us, and seems now like a heart condition. Indeed, we carry it for her cleansing. Perhaps St. Paul's mysterious reference in Col. 1:24 to bear in one's body a share in Jesus' suffering for His body applies here. Who knows? We pray on.

My friend Dana recalled her experience of a 14-mile procession she and friends made one Good Friday with a large wooden cross—each took turns shouldering it: 'As I carried the cross, it sunk into me and its weight increased. It became a part of me; I realized that it was Jesus inviting me to walk with Him to help carry His cross. What seemed too heavy became doable with Him.' Christ in us: to suffer, and to hope for glory (Col. 1: 27). That reminds me of Bonhoeffer's words: 'We know too little in the church today about the peculiar blessing of bearing. Bearing, not shaking off; bearing, but not collapsing either; bearing as Christ bore the cross, remaining underneath, and there beneath it, to find Christ.'

Having looked hard together at a scandalized Church, we have done more than meet to pray; rather, we have received a spirit of prayer with which to pray unceasingly for her. Over the long haul. Change takes time and occurs as prayer like underground wells spring up on the earth and accomplish the impossible.

We pray for witnesses of transformation in the sexual arena to arise and take their places alongside leaders who welcome, guide, and amplify their experience of an empowered Gospel.

We pray for the eloquent truth of Pope Emeritus Benedict—'Sexuality has an intrinsic meaning and direction which is not homosexual...its meaning is to bring about the union of man and woman which gives humanity posterity, children, future. This...is the essence of sexuality'—to fuse with the fatherly compassion of Pope Francis. May that fullness of mercy and truth compel Christians to turn from sexual sin (beginning with clergy) toward the arduous, splendid process of becoming chaste.

We pray for courageous leaders who eschew politics for the transformation of souls. Might

orthodox leaders refuse clericalism by equipping lay men and women to serve the broken; might the unorthodox be routed lest the Church's mercy be diluted further by the call to 'accompaniment' without repentance or discipline.

Might we, horrified by our own sin, find beneath the cross that no sin can ever be alien to us (Bonhoeffer) and in mercy cry out for all sinners--bishops and busboys, popes and plumbers. Might God grace us to bear holy grief and the hope of glory long after Lent.

'We do not want you to grieve like those who have no hope...' (1 Thess. 4:13).

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