

March 15, 2009

I consider Lent successful for me if I succeed in keeping my focus more clearly on Jesus and grow deeper in His love.

St. Paul can inspire us in this regard. Paul's faith was not a theory or an opinion about God and the world. Paul's faith resulted from the impact that Jesus' love had upon his heart. Paul felt himself loved by Jesus with an entirely personal love. He knew that Jesus suffered and died, not for some unidentified cause, but for the love of him and each one of us.

This weekend's Second Reading is taken from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1:22-25). Paul says: "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Jesus crucified consumed every fiber of Paul's being and gave true meaning to his life. Paul explained it this way in his Letter to the Galatians: "Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal 6:16).

For Paul, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were inseparable. They were the guide for his life, the light for his steps, the strength of his virtue, and the sole object in which he boasted.

The cross of Jesus helped Paul find meaning in his own hardships, grief, rejection, shortcomings, imprisonment, and ultimately, martyrdom. In the cross of Jesus, Paul rooted his hope. Why? Because for him, it is the power of God. In what way?

The cross shows the power of God's love for us. It reveals our weakness and sinfulness, on the one hand, but the gratuitous love of God on the other.

Jesus died for everyone. Through His death, He reconciled us and brought us into the embrace of God's love. No sin is beyond the reach of Jesus' love. For Paul, the dying and rising of Jesus was the reality that explained everything else and revealed the true face of God. The depth of God's love is revealed in the life of Jesus poured out for us on the cross. It revealed to Paul that our personal experiences of sin, limitation, and weakness are subsumed in the crucified body of Jesus who gave Himself for us.

The experience of Jesus' love transformed Paul and impelled him to speak, preach, and seek to spread that love to the ends of the earth. He cried out: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

May the power of Jesus crucified and risen for us and for our salvation envelop us and transform us as it did St. Paul!