

The Paradox of the Cross

It is a phenomenon of human nature that we often come to greater self-awareness through tragedy and adversity.

Mary Lou and Jim Beers were happily married with four children when, at the age of twenty-nine, Jim suffered an incapacitating stroke that left him unable to speak or care for himself. Initially he would communicate with Mary Lou by tapping out letters with his foot. Eventually a voice synthesizer allowed him to write letters and “speak.”

Eventually a fifth child was born. Jim and Mary Lou spent the better part of the years following his stroke until his death at the age of sixty-five in 2006 speaking to teens and young couples all over Northeastern Ohio, spreading the good news of Christ’s healing presence shining through human adversity.

Such was the case on Calvary. Jesus was confronted by the crowd and by the thief on his left to prove his divinity by denying his humanity. They tempted him to reject the ultimate characteristic of human frailty, death.

But the “good thief” offered the reality check that marked Jesus’ whole life, compassion for the lost, the broken, the weak. So with compassion and identifying with the human condition, Jesus embraced the request of that outcast. The cross allowed him to embrace humanity in its totality and so he came to the glory of his divinity. That’s the paradox of the cross!

Jesus’ story is our story as well. It was the hallmark of [Jim and Mary Lou’s story](#). It was true of the good thief who acknowledged his weakness and his dependence on the Christ. It was true of King David who only came to his true self when he acknowledged his sinfulness and embraced his role as shepherd of his people. You and I, too, grow in self-awareness when we acknowledge our true selves, warts and all, and embrace the crosses in our lives, the adversities, the tragedies, the crises. Like Jesus, the acceptance of who we are is the key to our true selves.

Most often, however, we are too proud to acknowledge that we are in fact weak, frail and dependent. We think that we can do all things. We are in control. We will live forever. But in difficult times, the times

of brokenness, loneliness, adversity, we are forced to face our humanity head on. Like Jesus on the cross, we are tempted to deny who we are. But the paradox of the cross should remind us that it is in our helplessness that we can best recognize our covenant relationship with our God, who, Saint Paul reminds us today,

*...delivered us from the power of darkness
and transferred us to the kingdom of God's beloved Son,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

It is in those same times of self-awareness that we, like Jesus in his darkest moment, can see our oneness with the rest of humanity and help us understand why **COMPASSION IS THE KEY TO THE KINGDOM.**

So in a sense, this celebration of Christ the King is not just the feast of a KING; it is a feast of the KINGDOM, the Reign of God. On the cross Jesus became the Cosmic Christ because by embracing the totality of his humanity, he embraced all of creation – in the context of his divine mission of compassion. Every Eucharist celebrates this profound transformation as a sacrament of our own destiny. We, too, as

we gather here are called to come to grips with who we are, yielding to our dependence on God and our oneness with the rest of suffering, weak humanity. So that in this Eucharist, embracing the Sacrament of Divine Compassion, we can rejoice in the paradox of the cross, a symbol not of death but a proclamation of life as we echo with confidence the words of the Good Thief and all who humbly come to self-awareness

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.