

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Carrying your cross..."



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Mary D. Ford

In a sermon preached on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Francis de Sales remarked: "St. Paul, the outstanding master and teacher of the newborn Church, discovered in the crucified Christ the blissful well-spring of his love, the theme of his sermons, the source of his boasting, the goal of all his ambitions in this world and the anchor of all his hopes for the world to come. I had no thought, he says, of bringing you any other knowledge than that of Jesus Christ, and of him crucified. God forbid that I should make a display of anything, except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

The cross of Christ is the core of our life. The cross of Christ is the central image of our faith. The cross of Christ is the path to our salvation.

Still, no less than five times in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus makes it very clear: if we wish to be his disciples, we must be willing to pick up not his cross, but pick up our cross. We are not called to carry his cross, but ours. Put another way, we imitate the power and the promise of the cross of Christ precisely by being willing to embrace the crosses — the challenges, the burdens, the setbacks — that are part and parcel of our lives.

In short, the cross that we carry is the need to be ourselves — not somebody else — and to take all that comes with that effort.

The crosses we carry are specific to the state and stage of life in which we find ourselves. Francis de Sales offers the following examples of the kinds of crosses that we might be asked to carry.

"To the pastors of the Church I offer a cross of care and labor, a shepherd's toil to protect, to feed, to correct and perfect the flock. This was the cross first carried by our Lord who called himself the Good Shepherd: witness his journeys, his fatigue by Jacob's well, his loving care for those who treated him badly."

"To religious I offer the cross of solitude, celibacy and unworldliness. It is a cross that has touched the True Cross; it is a cross that was carried by Our Lady, the holiest, most innocent and completely crucified of all who ever loved the cross for Christ."

"To those serving in government, I present the cross of learning, fairness and the sincerity of truth: a cross worthy of those who, St. Paul says, are in God's service. Such a cross is ideal for crucifying merely secular values, for repressing self-interest: it en-

courages peace and quiet in the realm."

"To workers, I offer the cross of humility and labor, a cross sanctified by our Lord himself in the carpenter's shop. The cross of daily work is often a sure way to salvation; it may also be the best means of avoiding sin, for the devil finds work for idle hands."

"For teenagers I have chosen the cross of obedience, purity and self-discipline. It will crucify the young blood of passion that is just coming to a boil: the boldness of youth still awaiting the guiding hand of prudence. It will teach them to bear the easy yoke of Christ in whatever calling in life God may place them."

"For old people there is the cross of patience, gentleness and a helpful attitude towards the young. This cross demands a brave heart. They have learned that swift as a breath our lives pass away..."

"There is no shortage of crosses for married folk, but perhaps I could single out the cross of mutual support and faithfulness, and the cross of bringing up a family..." There is but one cross of Jesus Christ. For us, however, our crosses come in many shapes, sizes and situations. What cross might Christ be asking me to carry today?

