

3 Lent B

March 7, 2021

St. Patrick

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This Lenten Sunday begins with the Apostle Paul putting it bluntly. Listen again: **“The message about the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...but we proclaim Christ crucified.”**

Yes, **“we proclaim Christ crucified!”**

This past September a cherished parishioner died, his name being Laney Merrill. In his 70s, Laney became a Catholic only six years ago. He lived at the Parkview Retirement Home overlooking Overton Park. Each Sunday, confined to his wheel chair, he would take two MATA busses to participate every Sunday at the 8:30 a.m. Mass. Over time parishioner Sharon Evans began to pick him up each Sunday at the Parkview.

His link with St. Patrick’s goes back fifty years, and veteran parishioners know the story well. When Laney was in his 20s, the Paulist priests hired Laney to repair the roofing at the top of our five-story bell tower. The Paulists solicited bids, and all the other bids were very high. They all included renting a “cherry picker,” a crane that would reach to the top of our bell tower. Laney came appreciably under the other bids. He didn’t need a crane. He got a parachute harness, and from the top of the bell tower he repaired the roofing, all the while Laney being harnessed to the cross that stood firm on the very top of our bell tower!

*Harnessed to the cross!*

Friends: The Apostle Paul shouts out, **“We proclaim Christ crucified!”** Indeed, the Apostle Paul was likewise “harnessed to the cross.” To so many in his time, that cross was an embarrassment, a **“stumbling block,”** equivalent to the electric chair in our day. It was unimaginable back then that the Messiah, our Savior, would be penned to the wood of the cross.

This Lent, *we’re* called to be “harnessed to the cross” in our daily life. It’s one thing to be a fan of Jesus, posting a thumbs-up to his story, and have an attractive cross dangling around our neck. It’s another thing, St. Patrick’s, truly to *live* as his disciples right now in every dimension of our lives—yes, “harnessed to his cross.”

Let me give an example. Her name is St. Katharine Drexel, and her feast day was last week. In the latter part of the 1800s, her father Francis ran the world's largest investment business. However, he believed that his great wealth really belonged to God. He knew well the heart of the seventh commandment—“**You shall not steal**”—and that he was called to share that wealth with the poor (1). His daughter Katharine followed his example and spent all her \$14 million inheritance (It would be \$400 million in today's currency!) on those who were especially on the fringe.

A group of 15 parishioners are reading together now the powerful book written by Isabel Wilkerson, entitled *Caste*. Persuasively Wilkerson shows that, for four hundred years beginning with the pilgrims, our nation is based on a caste system, similar to that in India. The lowest caste, the “untouchables,” are African-Americans. Katharine Drexel had that insight in the latter part of the 1800s.

She could have poured her inheritance into aiding the flood of Catholic immigrants coming into our country from Europe. Instead, Katharine Drexel put her focus on the lowest caste—African-Americans and Native Americans. She founded and staffed more than fifty schools, including the founding of the African-American Xavier University in New Orleans. As she put it, “Nothing is too good for my students!” She found her joy in this bold mission.

Katharine Drexel was really “harnessed to the cross.” At its start, the windows of Xavier University were shattered by whites in the neighborhood who didn't want “those” people in their neighborhood. In 1926, at the convent in Texas where she lived with other sisters, the KKK burned a cross on their lawn, and called her community “nigger sisters.”

Katharine Drexel wasn't just a fan of Jesus. She lived as his disciple, truly “harnessed to the cross.” St. Patrick's: In our living out the Ten Commandments, in our daily witness, we're truly called to be “harnessed to the cross.” And the cross atop our bell tower can remind us!

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(1) See Kathy Coffey, “Human Efforts, God's Desires,” in *Give Us This Day—March 2021* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021) pg. 42.

*General Intercessions*

*Third Sunday of Lent*

*March 7, 2021*

**Deepen within us, your church, a zeal for your house and a spirit of thanksgiving for all our blessings; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Foster within us this Lent a spirit of deeper prayer, fasting, and outreach to those in need; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Protect Pope Francis as he concludes his pilgrimage to Iraq; and, in the land there where Abraham was born, deepen the bonds among Jews, Christians, and Muslims; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Strengthen the bonds of love between married persons, parents and children, and all who strive to make a home; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Return to health those who suffer from Covid-19; console their loved ones in their anguish; give us care in protecting others from the coronavirus; and deepen hope within us all; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Embrace with your tender love all who have died, especially as we pray for Al Tenorio; we pray to you, O Lord—**

