

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, St. Paul observes in his letter to the Philippians that many “**conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ**” (Phil 3:18). He goes on to point out that they are rooted in this world, refusing to focus on the things that last. He says,

Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their “shame.” Their minds are occupied with earthly things (3:19).

As I have been meditating on this passage, I see myself in this. Not that I consciously reject the cross of Christ; not that I purposely think only of earthly things. However, most of the time when things get uncomfortable for me I get cranky. While I don’t worship my stomach (that would be *weird*), I do often go to food for comfort instead of turning my emptiness over to God. (Please note that I am not talking about the emptiness of hunger pains here, which would be in line with the natural and good use of food, but rather trying to fill my emotional emptiness or relieve stress through eating.) The cross of Christ is always beautiful to me ... until I feel the weight or the pain of the cross, and then ... well, to be frank, I don’t want it!

What does all of this mean? Well, while I am striving to love God and embrace His cross, my life shows in practice that much of my thinking and actions tend naturally toward earthly, and an enemy to the cross. What does this look like for you? Where do you fall in your walk with Christ?

I think this is part of the purpose of Lent. We have forty days to face the cross in a conscious way. We fast to get in touch with our hunger, and how we (I) use food inappropriately as a means to something other than health or fellowship. We (I) look at the cross of Christ to see how I can find a *use* for my discomfort and pain – as a way to get closer to the Crucified One – instead of running from it, or trying to numb it at the first sign of suffering.

The good news is what St. Paul follows with:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself. (Phil 3:20-21)

Do you get that? Jesus will change our bodies to conform with His. He redeems our bodies. In this world, He can redeem our longings, our hungers, our desires. He wants to. Many times, we resist, not believing that He really will fulfill our desires. I think of Adam and Eve, and how they didn’t trust God to fill their desire and so reached out and took the forbidden fruit. Theologians over the centuries have pondered over whether God Himself may have given them the fruit at the proper time, but because they *took* instead of *receiving*, they tried to *control* instead of *trusting*, we ended up in the mess we’re in.

Do we trust that God is going to fulfill our desires? Do we trust that when He says, “let go” that He wants to fill our hands with so much more and better? Do we see that when we *grasp* at passing things for happiness, they leave us empty until we *open our hands* to receive the joy of the Lord?

The Gospel today speaks of the Transfiguration of Jesus. We see how the change in Jesus, that His humanity shows forth the light of His divinity. Moses and Elijah come to speak to Him about His suffering and cross (the “**exodus**” Luke 9:31). We can see how the Transfiguration and the voice of the Father from the cloud (“**This is my chosen Son; listen to him.**” Luke 9:35) strengthened Jesus for His suffering and death, *and* prepared Peter, John and James to be grounded in the divinity of Jesus despite the suffering and death He was to undergo.

God wants to change us as well, prepare us as well. He came, not to impose hard (or impossible) rules on us, but to *redeem* our hearts, minds, bodies and souls so that we would be able to do the impossible, to live with hearts for God. **He** changes us. Do we trust Him? Do we allow Him to lead our lives, *even our desires*? He wants to give us so much, but we have to be open to *receiving* it, not grasping at false control.