



Feast of St. Helen

Reflection by Rev. John G. Montejano, KCHS

Any serious Christian pilgrim to Rome cannot fail to visit both the *Scala Santa* and *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*. The *Scala Santa* are the stairs which led to the praetorium of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. And *Santa Croce* is the minor basilica which houses several relics of the Passion of Our Lord. What unites these two important Christian shrines, beyond the Passion of Jesus, is the Empress St. Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine I, who brought these treasured relics to Rome.

Like Christians throughout the centuries, Helena was drawn to the Cross and desired to contemplate and venerate the saving Cross of Jesus. As Christians we are often confronted with the reality of the Cross in life. Our faith is centered on the deep meaning of the Cross. Yet, I believe that if we are honest with ourselves, really honest, many of us may fear the Cross. Despite the fact that we adore it, bow before it, bless with it and sing about it, in reality the Cross remains a hard pill to swallow. Jesus himself said: “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass...” (Luke 22:42)

We must remember always, we do not carry the cross alone. Christ carries the Cross with us as we cooperate and share in his sufferings and struggle. The Cross is an essential and necessary part of our discipleship: “If anyone wants to be my disciple, they must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

The Passion also brings to mind those whom Christ met along the way, like Mary, Veronica, and Simon of Cyrene. Mary, who John’s Gospel says was at the foot of the Cross, stood by her son till the end. What must have been in her mind? She is there accompanying Jesus, sharing in his suffering. A loving mother carrying her child’s suffering and pain.

The Gospels speak of the “mourning women of Jerusalem.” One of whom our tradition names to be Veronica. Veronica represents the countless people of good will who are there along the path of life to support us, help us, and encourage us. Next, the Gospel mentions “Simon of Cyrene”, who was pressed into the service of the Lord. He was someone who saw Christ passing, but was indifferent to him, his message, and his following, and only later came to understand who Jesus was.

What is our attitude before the Cross? We encounter it all the time in daily inconveniences, traffic jams on the freeway, misunderstandings at work, disruptions to our schedule, disappointments, illness, and so on. The purpose of the Cross is to prepare us for Heaven. Do we hide from it or accept it? Do we, like Mary and Veronica, seek to help others in life with their cross and suffering? For when we shoulder the Cross with Christ, it changes us like Simon and the Good Thief. If we can accept it like the Good Thief, then Jesus will one day say to us as well: “This Day you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43).

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