

**Today I would like to talk to you about crucifixes and crosses. On every altar in the immense Basilica of St Peter in Rome, you can see a shining bronze crucifix, more than a yard high, gleaming brilliantly in the glowing light. Every single one of them is cast from a model made by one of the greatest artists in the history of the world: Gianlorenzo Bernini [john-lohr-EHN-zoh] [behr-KNEE- knee].**

**Many of the crosses and crucifixes that faithful Catholics use as jewelry are decorated with gold and diamonds and precious jewels. The monstrances used throughout the world for the adoration of the Eucharist are covered with gold plating and many inlaid with rubies and diamonds and emeralds.**

**In a sense, this is a strange tradition After all; the cross was an instrument of cruel torture the cruelest torture ever invented by man. The nails were driven through the nerve bundles between the wrist and the palm of the hand, so every time the criminal moved, which he had to do if he wanted to keep breathing, the nails rubbed against the raw nerves. But the cross wasn't just a generic instrument of torture. It is the one that we used to crucify our God. It symbolizes the evil of sin - of each of our sins.**

**And yet, wherever you go in the world, you will see crosses and crucifixes**

beautifully, exquisitely decorated with gold and jewels. Why, because the cross is by far our most valuable possession. The very intensity of the suffering it represents indicates the almost unbelievable intensity of love that God has for each one of us.

It is Christ's cross that wins back our trust in God, the source of true happiness. While he is dying on the cross, he looks out at each one of us, whose sins have nailed him there, and he says: I forgive you, do not fear, come back, I want your friendship. What could be more valuable than that? This is why we decorate our crucifixes.

Now what about our personal crosses, those trials in our lives? Whether we believe in Jesus or not, we will suffer in this life. That's the way things are in a fallen world.

So the question isn't finding a way to avoid the cross, but gradually learning to accept our crosses the way Christ accepted his, gradually letting the Holy Spirit reveal to our hearts the meaning of the cross. Even if we try to ignore, hide, or do away with our crosses, we can't; the cross will keep showing up.

And that's because God wants to use it to lift us closer to him, and he never gets tired of trying to do that.

**As St Ignatius of Loyola put it, "There is no wood more useful for kindling and feeding the fire of divine love than the wood of the cross." And as St Francis of Assisi said, "I exhort you brethren; have continually before your mind the blessed passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will strengthen you, and encourage you to suffer more generously for the sake of his Love."**

**One mistake that we all tend to make in our Christian journey is the mistake of going it alone. Jesus doesn't intend for us to follow his example all by ourselves. He wants to walk by our side, to carry our crosses with us. This is why we kiss the cross today.**

**When we try to carry our crosses alone, one of two things happens. Either we become self-righteous, arrogant, and harsh towards others, like the Pharisees. Or else we become sad and joyless, as if the weight of the whole world were on our shoulders. But when we carry our crosses with Christ, we keep the balance, learning how to be realistic about the sinful state of the world without losing our sense of humor. When suffering comes our way, when we feel the weight of the cross in our own lives, it is easy to forget about this deeper meaning behind it. We all know people who are suffering whether it's the loss of a loved one, financial struggles, family strife, or illness. There are**

**people all around us who are out there trying to bear their heavy crosses all alone.**

**As followers of Christ, we are called to help them carry that cross, just as Jesus helps us carry ours. By reaching out to others, even in very simple ways like a phone call, an email or a personal visit to tell them we are praying for them, we lighten their burden and unite ourselves to Jesus.**

**As we continue to celebrate this great day of our redemption, let's thank Jesus for wanting to help us carry our crosses, and let's promise him that we will never again try to carry them alone.**

**Today is a sad day, because we see the real consequences of our sins, but it is also a joyful day, because we see that Jesus is willing to walk with us through life no matter how hard it gets.**

**In a few moments, Jesus will give himself to us once again in Holy Communion. He will prove yet one more time that he wants to accompany us and strengthen us, so that we don't have to carry our crosses alone.**