

Bishop Karol Kulczycki SDS's homily during the Lenten Pilgrimage of Poles to Polish Hill River 2022

The Gift of the Cross - Salvation

**The path I must walk leads through the cross.
The road that Jesus walked led Him to the cross.
So, what is this cross - the end or the beginning
of the journey? What happened on the cross that
changed the lives of millions of people throughout
the ages? How is it that the sign of suffering,
of cruel torment, has become a sign of peace
and life?**



In our reflection, let us turn to the pages of the Holy Scriptures.

We remember that the God of the Old Testament was: “a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:6-7).

We also remember that the first parents in paradise committed original sin. They were disobedient before God and were punished—expelled from paradise. Cain was punished when he killed his brother. God drowned the wicked and sinful world in the flood. The Old Testament God guided people with a firm hand and mercilessly punished them.

But this same God was “full of compassion and mercy” and sent His Son to reveal God’s mercy to the whole world. The teachers of the Law—the Jews—expected a Messiah who would come from God and free the nation. Furthermore, they expected a warrior Messiah who would come from God. He would have great power and be a king or high priest, inciting the Jews to rebel against the occupiers.

They didn't like this Jesus, the poor man who was regarded by the simple people as the Messiah. He didn't want to fight, and he spoke out against the teachers of the Law. After Jesus was captured, all the teachers of the Law gathered to condemn him to death. Humanity dared to pass judgment on God. This judgment was: "He must die!", "Crucify him!" For what guilt was such a sentence pronounced? For not meeting their expectations of gaining power over other nations. For the desire for power, the sentence was: "*Crucify him!*"

Doesn't this sound familiar in our times? Because of the desire for power and control over other nations, the war in Ukraine is ongoing. People are suffering and dying now simply because someone has a great thirst for power. The judgment of man against God was not only issued two thousand years ago, but it continues to take place in our times.

To this day, humanity still condemns God to death: - because God is an inconvenient witness to the truth, - because God reminds humanity of natural law, - because God forbids killing a child still in the womb of the mother, - because, because, because...

Man condemned God to a shameful death on the cross, but on the cross, God judged humanity! God issued a verdict on man. On the cross, God judged people for deceit, lies,

and unjust verdicts. From the heights of the cross, Jesus pronounces the divine judgment: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," "Father, forgive them..."

Is there any greater mercy than this? When God forgives the executioner, He forgives from the heights of the cross. This forgiveness flowing from the lips of the Son of God completely changed the image of the cross. The cross became a sign of forgiveness and divine mercy. From now on, the cross is neither the beginning nor the end of the journey. The cross became a gate leading to the fullness of life in the presence of God, a gate leading to the lost paradise.

Our salvation consists of restoring lost life. In this sense, the cross is not only a sign of our salvation but also a gate leading to the fullness of life. This salvation was accomplished through the act of God's forgiveness. God teaches us how we should forgive: *"Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. (...) Do to others as you would have them do to you!"* (Luke 6:27-31)

Jesus was crucified two thousand years ago, but His forgiveness is timeless and applies to us today as well. God has given us an example of forgiveness, and if we, as Christians, do not forgive, then every time we pray *"Our Father"* and say, *"forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,"* we may be closing the door to salvation.

If God forgives you, go and do likewise, and salvation will be part of your household.

*Salvation came through the cross,
It is a great mystery.
Every suffering has meaning,
It leads to the fullness of life.*

*Everyday life leads through the cross,
The greater you love, the more intensely.
You don't have to perish today,
But crucify your heart.*

*Every glance at the cross
Should bring a sense of unease.
For everything in life is nothing
In the face of such great love.*

*If you want to follow me,
Take up your cross each day
And walk with me to save the world
In the coming age.*

