

# ACCEPTING GOD'S WAY OF REDEMPTION



Christ On The Cross by Mihály Munkácsy, 1884

**D**URING this season of Lent we especially turn our attention to meditating on the great drama of Our Lord's Passion and Death. As we watch the drama unfold, we see that some of the key players in this drama are the Scribes and Pharisees and the Chief Priests who have developed a deadly hostility toward Our Lord. These were the leaders of the Jewish people, the ones who were the experts in the Law and the Prophets. They were the ones who claimed to know what the Messiah was supposed to look like and, in their minds, Jesus obviously didn't fit the description. They had their checklist, as it were, of the qualities of the Messiah and Jesus didn't fulfill the requirements. He didn't measure up to their expectations. In fact, He was something of an embarrassment and even worse than an embarrassment: He was dangerous and so He would have to go. And once they managed to have Him killed they were all the more convinced that this man couldn't have been the Messiah. Messiahs aren't supposed to be killed by their enemies; Messiahs aren't

supposed to die slow, tortuous and humiliating deaths on a cross.

And then we could turn and reflect on Christ's own disciples as the drama develops. They had been with Our Lord all during His public ministry. They had seen all the wonders and miracles. They came to know Jesus up close and they believed He was the Messiah; He was the long-awaited Savior of Israel. But then, as they began to witness the unfolding of the Our Lord's Passion, they became completely confused and disoriented and disillusioned. How could this be happening? It must have seemed to them a complete disaster. Our Lord was also not meeting their expectations as the Messiah and how the Messiah was supposed to go about redeeming the world.

With these reflections in mind, I think we would do well also to ask ourselves: Are we completely satisfied with the way in which God has gone about redeeming the world? Have we completely accepted the ways of God in this regard? Has Christ's redemption met all

our expectations? We all believe that God redeemed the world through Christ's suffering and death, but as we look out at the world that Christ redeemed what do we see? We see all kinds of division and conflict. We see wars and violence and terrible suffering. We see our country deeply divided. We see hunger and poverty. Does this look like a world that has been redeemed? Look at the state of the Church: We live in times of deep conflict and confusion in the Church – Bishop against Bishop, Cardinal against Cardinal. Does this look like a redeemed Church? Are you completely satisfied with the way in which God has redeemed His Church? And then we could look at our own lives. Most people are disappointed in life, disappointed in love. A man marries his ideal woman and a woman marries her ideal man. And then after some years, reality begins to set in and their love is challenged, perhaps in ways they didn't expect. Family life often has all kinds of messiness attached to it. A young man joins a monastery and many years later he finds himself asking: "Is this really what I signed up for?"

In other words, we live in a world where Christ's redemption doesn't take away the messiness of the world; it doesn't take away the messiness of our lives; it doesn't tidy up the messiness of our Church or of our families. Are we content with a redemption that leaves us with so much pain? Or do we keep hoping for a kind of redemption that will finally set this world right, that will set our country right, that will set our Church and our own lives right, (according to *our* notions of what is right). Have we really come to accept the way in which God has redeemed the world, or do we perhaps wish that He would do it differently; that He would at least take away more of the messiness and pain and suffering and confusion? But that is evidently not the kind of redemption that Christ brought us.

When we look back at the Apostles, we can see that they were given the light and the grace to come to a place of total acceptance. With Christ's rising from the dead, everything changes: hope is restored and the Apostles slowly begin to understand. Especially after Pentecost,

we see that they have come to completely accept Our Lord's Passion and Death as the great saving act of God by which he redeemed the world. When they go out to preach the Gospel to the world it is above all Christ's suffering, death and resurrection that they preach. They just have to tell the world about this thing that has happened. It is their principle message.

And so we might wonder: What is it that worked this amazing transformation in the hearts of the Apostles; what changed them? I think it was because they experienced the love of God poured into their hearts. God allowed them to see beyond the outward suffering and humiliation. He made them see that what appeared to

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be a senseless act of violence was, in fact, the greatest act of God's love. It was not suffering as such that saved the world, it was love. It is easy to see the suffering, it takes a special gift of God to see the love. We see a clear manifestation of this love in the appearances of Our Lord to his disciples. When He comes to them in the Upper Room there are no reproaches, no mentioning of their cowardice and failure, just an overflowing manifestation of God's mercy. No doubt, the Apostles were feeling rather guilty and had a deep sense of shame but Our Lord acts in a way to completely dispel those feelings. He never humiliates those who humiliated Him; He never shames those who shamed Him. He only rebukes the disciples for one thing: the fact that they did not *believe* the report of the women whom He sent. The only thing that concerns Him is their lack of faith. And that concern is also a manifestation of Our Lord's love. He wants, above all, to draw us to Himself and He can only do that through our faith and trust.

And isn't that what He might reproach us with as well? If we are not completely satisfied with the way in which God has redeemed the world, perhaps our faith needs to be stronger, perhaps our trust in God and His fatherly providence needs to grow. This trust in God's ways is the very condition for experiencing the joy of Easter in all its depth. We can experience a tremendous amount of peace and joy if we just let God be God, if we let Him order the universe as He sees fit, if we accept

how He has ordered our lives, if we come to accept all the pain and messiness of our lives as part of His fatherly plan for us. There is much suffering and pain and messiness in the world and we tend to focus all our attention on it, but there is also love. A new kind of love has entered the world because God has loved us first and shown us what true love looks like. Love doesn't usually make the headlines, but if we start to look for it we will find it. If there is a place where you don't find

it, put it there and then you will find it. When we come to know by experience the love that God has shown us, the love that God has for us in all the circumstances of our lives, then we will experience the joy of Easter, a joy that is simply unshakeable because it is founded on the immovable rock of God's mercy and love.

