

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion – Year C
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
19 April 2019

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 31
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
(Philippians 2:8-9) John 18:1-19:42

Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope

As the devastating fire engulfed Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris on Monday evening, images of the burning roof and collapsing spire were being broadcast all over the world by every news service. A Reuters News photographer on the scene realized there would be only one shot that would set him apart from all the others. Everyone was showing the outside, but the “image that wasn’t out there was Notre-Dame’s interior.” He said to himself: “That’s what I need to see.”¹

So, he did what he said news photographers do “day in [and] day out.” He worked his way around barricades and past police and firemen who were trying to secure the scene and keep people like him away. He made it to the doorway, and with a few clicks of his camera, “gave the world its first view inside the [burning cathedral].”

The photo was described as: “...an eerie shot down [the nave], smoke rising from blackened debris..., silhouetted angel figurines against the wall and a raised golden cross on the altar, bathed in...light.” Headlines from around the world quickly took notice:

“Powerful image shows cross shining through wreckage at Notre Dame Cathedral” (aol.com)

“The cross still stands...Signs of hope out of the Notre Dame Cathedral fire” (USA Today)

“Cross Appearing to Glow at Notre Dame...Seen as Symbol of Hope” (Inside Edition)

“Lit cross above the ruins offers hope amid Notre-Dame debris” (Reuters)

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Not everyone, however, was so impressed by the image. In general, you should *never* read the comments section on the internet. But, I read a few and noticed those of a few folks

who refused to see the image of the cross as a sign of hope. Rather, they used their wit and sarcasm to show that it was not a big deal. [Of course the cross is still there because:]

“...the fire was put out before it made it into that room which is surrounded by stone...”

“...rock and metal [don't] burn fast, because science.”

“...who could've imagined metal can withstand higher temperatures than wood. And it reflects light, too. Never seen that before; must be a miracle.”

These negative folks – also known as “internet trolls” – attempted to explain – or explain away – what so many others saw in the photograph. But their explanations were hollow and fell woefully short, because they failed to acknowledge something much greater and more profound than the melting temperature of metal. Their comments – addressing the material properties of the metal cross – had nothing to do with *why* the image had such an impact on the world.

The photographer himself recognized the impact, but didn't fully understand it, saying, “I don't know why this shot had an impact on people. Did I see it at just the right moment? I don't know.”

As millions watched what looked like destruction and hopelessness unfolding on the outside, this photograph offered something altogether different: *a sign of hope!* When all looked lost from the outside, this image offered a glimpse of a deeper reality: *that God is at work, bringing about redemption.* And it's no accident that at the center of this image of hope was the cross. Still glowing; still standing; rising up out of the piles of ash, debris, and rubble.

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In a few moments, each of us will have the opportunity to adore the Cross. The instrument by which Jesus Christ redeemed the world – redeemed each and every one of us.² Why do we adore the Cross? Why did the photograph of the Cross still glowing and still standing in a burned-out Notre Dame Cathedral have such an impact on the world? A line from

an ancient Latin hymn dedicated to the Cross says it best³: *Ave Crux, Spes Unica*. Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope.⁴

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My friends, the Cross *is* our only Hope. That's *why* the image of the cross from inside Notre Dame Cathedral had such an impact on people all over the world. Because, when all seems lost and destroyed, the Cross reminds us, simply, *that it's not*. Because of the Cross, Jesus Christ conquered sin and death. Because of the Cross, each of us has been ransomed and set free from sin and death. Because of the Cross, we all have a way to resurrection and eternal life in Heaven.⁵



Smoke rises around the altar in front of the cross inside the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, April 15, 2019. REUTERS/Philippe Wojazer/Pool

¹ Philippe Wojazer, photographer identified in “Backstory: Lit cross above the ruins offers hope amid Notre-Dame debris” accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-notredame-backstory/backstory-lit-cross-above-the-ruins-offers-hope-amid-notre-dame-debris-idUSKCN1RS207>

² From *The Stations of the Cross*: “We adore You O Christ and we praise You. Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.”

Also see *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 618: “The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the ‘one mediator between God and men.’”

And CCC 1992: “Justification has been *merited for us by the Passion of Christ* who offered himself on the cross...the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men.”

³ *Vexilla Regis* by Venantius Fortunatus (530-609). Note that the referenced line is found in the last two stanzas, which were written by a later poet and subsequently added to the hymn.

⁴ CCC 617: “The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of Christ’s sacrifice as ‘the source of eternal salvation’ and teaches that ‘his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us.’ And the Church venerates his cross as it sings: ‘Hail, O Cross, our only hope.’”

⁵ St. Rose of Lima: “Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.” (Referenced in CCC 618)