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Lenten Meditation: The Crucified Presence, 1958

O.P. Kretzmann
Valparaiso University

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Pilgrims
March 1958-
D - Will you stay?
With you stay?

THE CRUCIFIED PRESENCE

O. P. Kretzmann

A Meditation for the Season of Lent

Again the Church faces Calvary. No fact in the long story of man is more timeless than the Cross. Nineteen hundred years ago the nails were driven, the hammers rang, and the blood of the world's Redeemer became a holy stream to wash away the guilt of all the world. But the world and the world's Savior were not done at twilight on Good Friday. The Cross became the one continuing shadow over the world of men. It is here today. It is boundless, endless, eternal, everlasting. 1900 years ago the voice of the Crucified was stilled only for a brief moment, to become the voice of all the ages, the Everlasting Mercy, and the Immortal Presence. In a world of griefs and graves it is our last joy and our only life.

It is the timelessness of the Cross and the nearness of the Crucified Presence which must be clear to us who may be so close to the end of years. It is timeless because there is no end of sin. A few moments ago I paged through the section of ^{the} hymnal devoted to the Passion of our Lord. How the pages ring with sin and woe and despair! Still the nails are driven and the hammers sound, yesterday's transgression, today's faults, tomorrow's faithlessness across the crown of thorns more firmly on the Wounded Head. Under the cold and dark reality of sin man without the Cross staggers to his doom. In all the world there is no more persistent and stubborn fact than the fact of sin -- ~~your sin and my sin~~, the sin of our weakness and our pride, the sin which crucifies our Lord again. As it reaches up and down into every nook and corner of life and living it results in the weary load of suffering and anguish, wars and rumors of war, agony and pain, which ^{is} the common lot of humanity. The terror of sin! Even Oscar Wilde knew its angry meaning:

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The Crucified Presence
-2-

O smitten mouth, O forehead crowned with thorn

O chalice of our common miseries!

Thou for our own sakes that loved Thee not has borne

The agony of endless centuries.

If the timelessness of the Cross ^{was} only the timelessness of sin, there would be no light and no hope for the sin burdened heart. There is another side. The Crucified Presence is the timelessness of forgiveness, of the blasting out and the washing away of sin. 1900 years ago three men were hanging on three crosses, bleeding, weeping, thirsty, dying. Two were meeting death on their own behalf. One was meeting death for the world -- for us. Our sins were His. Our suffering was His. And -- the angels sing of it -- our forgiveness came through His death. His tears became our joy. His wounds were our health. His death is our Life.

Today this truth must now be burned into the heart of the world. Ellen Fowler, in her story of The Farringdons, tells the story of a girl who, attending divine services, saw the Figure of the Crucified in the great east window: "As she looked at the Figure which the world has wept over and worshipped for nineteen centuries, she realized that this was the symbol of all that she was giving up and leaving behind her -- the final signs of that religion of love and sorrow which men call Christianity. Slowly her eyes were opened, and she knew that the figure in the east window was no sign of an imaginary renunciation, no symbol of a worn-out creed, but the Picture of a Living Person, whose voice was calling her, and whose power was enfolding her and would not let her go." When that last veil is lifted by faith in Him, the cry of heart and flesh

The Crucified Presence

-5-

for the Crucified Presence is answered forever. It is the first ^{truth} tenth and the last, the truth that makes all other truths true and leads to Life Eternal.

We face Calvary. Now is the time to feel and know again the life and strength of the Crucified Presence. Twenty-five years ago, in the mud of ^{TO} No-man's land, Joyce Kilmer said it for all of us who now live:

"My shoulders ache beneath my pack

(Lie easier, Cross, upon His back)

Men shout at me who may not speak

(They scourged Thy back and smote Thy cheek)

When shall my fickle soul forget

(Thy Agony of Bloody Sweat?)

Lord, Thou didst suffer more for me

Than all the hosts of land and sea.

So let me render back again

This millionth of Thy gift. Amen."