

As the figures of Scripture constantly reveal to us, as this mother at her son's funeral revealed to me, we Christians are indeed "disciples with hope to bring." What's more, thankfully, this hope is neither self-generated, nor the logical response to the facts of any desperate situation. We are "disciples with hope to bring" because we are recipients of a divine gift - the gift of hope - which compels us to believe that the darkness and suffering we encounter in our lives is not the final fact.

In Jesus Christ, to whom we have consecrated our lives in Holy Cross, to whom each of us is consecrated in our baptism, God has blessed us with a stirring in our hearts, that in the face of darkness swells into a conviction, and then bursts forth defiantly in our words and actions: Easter Light will again shine, and it will never be overcome!

About the young student who died ... his friends and family started a scholarship fund here at Notre Dame in his name. Each year, his parents come out to present the scholarship. Each year, the same thing happens: the recipient of the scholarship - of course, a student about their son's age when he died - comes forward, and his parents' eyes fill with tears. And as the recipient reaches the stage, the mother begins to move forward, and then enfolds the student in

her arms... and even as she cries, her face breaks into an invincible joy.

I think I know what she is experiencing, because we share the same faith: she knows that there is only one great reality anymore, into which all the moments and events of our lives - happy or sad - must forevermore be measured. It is the deepest reality of our universe now. It is the reality of Easter - of Christ's Resurrection. And she knows her son's tragedy, like every moment of our lives, has been swallowed up in its Light. So let us join with her today, and every day, in the words of the Easter psalm: "This too is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice, and be glad in it!"

Let us never stop praying for the grace to be ever more opened to Christ's Easter gift of hope, that we might bear it with undaunted courage to a world often in darkness and despair, ever more becoming "disciples with hope to bring."

Fr. Lou DelFra, CSC, is Director of Pastoral Life, and a member of the faculty, of the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) at the University of Notre Dame. He also resides as priest-in-residence in Keenan Hall.



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Office of Development
P.O. Box 765, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0765
www.holycrossusa.org
development@holycrossusa.org

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God's Gift of Hope

Fr. Louis DelFra, C.S.C.

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Several years ago, one of our seniors at the University of Notre Dame was diagnosed with leukemia. Over the course of the next several months, many of us walked with him and his family, as we watched the disease pretty rapidly take his life. At a certain point, it became clear that he would not make it. A year and a half after his graduation, he had passed away.

Several of us Holy Cross priests traveled together to the family's home to attend the funeral. I remember arriving at the

“ This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad. ”

church for the wake, and seeing the young man's parents at the front of the Church, by the casket. My eyes started welling up as I saw the pain etched into their faces. And I realized I had no idea what to say to them. When we reached the young man's mom, however, it was

she who spoke first. Tears flowing freely from her eyes, the first words that came out of her mouth utterly stunned me, and will remain with me forever: “This too is the day the Lord has made; so let us give thanks and rejoice in it.”

Her words were so unexpected, indeed so seemingly out-of-place, that I still wrestle today to understand the grace that was at work in that moment. How could a mother, on the day of her son's funeral, and at the same time she was crying, pronounce the words of our Easter psalm: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us give thanks and rejoice in it”?

Our Scriptures, like our lives, are punctuated frequently by such seemingly hopeless situations. From Noah awakening on the fortieth straight day of the flood and gazing out on nothing but endless water; to Abraham walking alongside Isaac, the heir of the Covenant through which Abraham's offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, yet who now carries upon his shoulders the wood on which he will be sacrificed. From the anonymous friends of a paralyzed man, who carry him about Galilee on his stretcher, day after day, with no hope for a cure; to the courageous but terrified women who stand at the foot of Jesus' cross, watching their beloved teacher die.

As I contemplate any of these figures - perhaps especially Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross, or later by her beloved's tomb - I can't help but think of this Notre Dame mother, standing beside her son's casket, on the day of his funeral.

And yet ... even as this mother cried, and felt the depth of desolation of the loss of her son, she somehow uttered words of hope, words of belief in God's presence. “This too is the day the Lord has made; so let us give thanks and rejoice in it.”

Our Scriptures, too, bear out this most puzzling yet tenacious coupling of apparent tragedy with defiant expectation. Over the endless waters of the Great Flood, Noah sends out a bird. Knife in hand to complete the sacrifice, Abraham spots a ram in the thistle, and hears an angel's voice. The men carrying their paralyzed friend hear of a healer, climb a roof, and begin pulling up roof tile. The women prepare burial spices and venture vulnerably into the Sunday dawn, where Mary Magdalene hears an unknown gardener speak her name.

Such moments - in Scripture, in our own lives - thrust a most important question before us. What inspires us to perform, in the midst of difficulty or even tragedy, such defiant, almost senseless, action?

What, but God's gift of hope?



From the day I read the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, I have been transfixed by these audacious words from Constitution 8: The Cross, our Hope: “To struggle for justice and meet only stubbornness, to try to rally those who have despaired, to stand by the side of misery we cannot relieve, to preach the Lord to those who have little faith or do not wish to hear of him... our ministry will hint to us of Jesus' suffering for us. But we do not grieve as men without hope, for Christ the Lord has risen to die no more.... We must be men with hope to bring.”