

February 8, 2026 – 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Our opening hymn this morning painted an interesting picture in the fourth verse. “From the cross Thy wisdom shining Breaketh forth in conqu’ring might; From the cross forever beameth All Thy bright redeeming light.” The cross is described as shining, beaming, and bright. It’s a bit odd, isn’t it? When I think of Good Friday, I think of darkness. I think of gloom.

But this hymn says, “No! The cross is bright. The cross enlightens our darkness.” The cross is our great epiphany. That we will not be condemned, for Christ was crucified for you. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Who takes away the darkness of this world. The cross is the central truth of our faith that enlightens our minds.

And this is exactly why St. Paul says in our Epistle lesson today, “*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*” Now, at first glance, that might sound like Paul had a very short list of things to talk about. But that wasn’t the case at all. If you read the rest of this letter to the Corinthians, you’ll see that he discusses a wide range of complex issues: marriage and divorce, the proper practice of the Lord’s Supper, lawsuits and conflicts between parishioners, the hope of the resurrection, and the many spiritual gifts given to the Church.

To speak “only of Christ crucified” doesn’t mean we avoid these important issues. Rather, it means that every single one of those issues is revealed and understood only through the lens of the cross. We decide to know nothing but the cross because the cross is the light that enlightens everything else.

Name a topic, and the cross speaks to it. Take sin, for instance. The cross shows us the terrifying depth of our rebellion. As another great hymn puts it, “Ye who think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great, here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.” Our sin is so great that it took nothing less than the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from it.

The cross also teaches us about God’s personality. It reveals a God who is profoundly gracious and merciful. St. Paul argues in Romans 8 that if God did not “*spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*” If God willingly gave up His own Son for your forgiveness, it proves He delights in forgiving. The cross is the ultimate evidence that there is joy in heaven when even one sinner repents.

And each of these realizations leads to more great epiphanies. If we are forgiven in Christ, we are reconciled to the Father. If we are reconciled, we have peace with God. And if we have peace with God, we are enemies of the devil. If we are enemies of the devil, then that means he no longer has any claim on us.

We belong to God. And because we belong to Him, we are His heirs. And if we are his heirs, then we are beloved children, whom he will surely raise from the dead on the last day, just as he raised his only begotten Son on Easter morning. You see, the cross is the key to all wisdom, and once you have it, the Gospel reveals one truth on top of another on top of another. On and on, until God’s entire plan of salvation is revealed.

But the cross doesn’t just teach us the Gospel. It also teaches us about the Law. It teaches us how to live, and it completely changes our perspective on God’s commands. If you don’t understand the cross, then it’s easy to view the Law as an enemy. It’s easy to see God’s Law as a bad thing. As a constant, nagging reminder that you don’t measure up. It’s easy to hate the Law. And even for us as Christians, our sinful flesh still throws a temper tantrum when the Law is taught.

But the “new man” within you, the one standing in the bright light of the cross, views the Law differently. He begins to delight in the Law because he sees that the Law is actually cross-shaped. The Law is about denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus. The Law is about love. And we only love because He first loved us. And so the Law paints a picture of Jesus himself.

Take, for instance, what the Sixth Commandment says about marriage and purity. The world sees these boundaries as burdensome or restrictive. But St. Paul tells us that in this commandment, we see a beautiful mystery: a picture of Christ and the Church. We see how Christ, the Groom, loved His Bride by laying down His life for her. Therefore, to love your spouse is to imitate Jesus. Suddenly, the commandment isn't a burden. It's a joy. An amazing opportunity to reflect the love of your Savior to the person closest to you.

Every commandment becomes an opportunity to reflect that light. As Christ says in our Gospel reading, *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* We delight in the commandments because in fulfilling them, we see the love of Christ crucified.

So, the cross reveals everything. And when Paul opens this letter to the Corinthians by saying that he decided to know nothing but the cross, he was saying that the cross is the only Light that can truly reveal all the other topics that he had to speak to them about. Marriage, the Lord's Supper, conflict, the resurrection, spiritual gifts. All of them lead back to the cross.

Including, maybe most of all, the topic of suffering. Because when we suffer, our first cry is usually, "Why, Lord?" And while that question is nearly impossible to answer in the moment, the cross does help us eliminate some very wrong answers.

For one, the cross proves that your suffering is not happening because God is cruel, or because He is callous and doesn't care. Those answers can't be true. If He did not spare His own Son for you, He clearly loves you and has your eternal best interests at heart.

Second, the cross offers us some very holy possibilities. Perhaps God is using your trial to strengthen your faith and to teach you to pray, just as Jesus prayed in the Garden. Perhaps He is conforming you into the image of His Son, crucified on the cross, making you more Christlike in your suffering.

Perhaps He is removing an idol from your life, sweeping away the distractions and temptations, so that you long for the new world to come, the resurrection, where He will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Whatever the specific answer is for you, it is rooted in His love, shown on the cross.

You ask, "Why, Lord?" But that's the same question that the disciples asked on Good Friday, as they looked up at their Lord, dead on a cross. For them, the scene looked horrible and meaningless. And I have little doubt that at least one of them asked, "How can a good God allow this?" The enemy seemed to have won. Why, Lord? Why let this happen?

But it was this very moment that St. Peter later proclaimed happened *"according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."* God knew what the evil one would try to do, and He used those very intentions to accomplish His own plan of salvation. What they intended for evil, God meant for good. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Likewise, God knows your suffering. And though the devil intends to use that pain to drive a wedge between you and your heavenly Father, God will work all things for your good. If God can work the death of his own beloved Son for the good of all humanity, God can work your pain for good as well.

So don't ever move beyond the cross, as if the cross is just one of many equally important topics of our faith. Instead the cross speaks to every topic. It illuminates all things if we let it.

So let it illuminate your sin. When the cross reveals the depth of sin, don't scurry away like a cockroach, but let that light expose you, that you might confess and be forgiven. Let the cross illuminate God's personality, for he delights in forgiving you. Let the cross illuminate the Law, for Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, and the Law is very good!

And finally, let the cross shine light on your pain and suffering. It is the cross that will give you the endurance and patience you need to withstand your trials with faith. *"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."* For in Jesus Christ and him crucified, we know all that we need. Amen.