

A Reflection on the Holy Cross and the State of Things

Dear Christians,

Sunday, September 14, 2025, we will celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross. That is, we will celebrate what the perishing world considers to be foolishness. Yet, as our Lord will assure us, the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. And it is the foolishness of God that sent Christ Jesus, the Innocent One, to suffer the punishment of death for us, the guilty. He is our wellspring to Life Eternal, which poured forth from His precious wounds upon the Tree of the Cross. He has been given to us through the precious Word of the Cross and the blessed Sacraments He has instituted. By these means, He has joined our perishing lives to His endless life.

We will sing a hymn from *Walther's Hymnal* titled *Thou Man of Sorrows, Hail!* Stanza 4 is as follows:

*Thy conflict is our crown;
Thy death our life in heaven:
Lord, by Thy bonds to us
Is endless freedom given.
Thy cross our solace is;
Thy wounds salvation give:
Thy blood our ransom price;
By this we sinners live. (WH 83)*

We need to meditate upon our suffering Jesus and the indignities and the scorn He bore for us, especially at this, the End of the Age. *We need to pay special attention to the manner that He bears such things.* Paul Gerhardt describes Christ's manner in suffering thusly,

*He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies,
The mockery, and yet replies,
"All this I gladly suffer." (LSB 438)*

Our country and the world bore witness to something very heinous in the assassination of Charlie Kirk on September 10, 2025. Such brutality visited upon a prominent public figure in the open light of day is shuddering. St. John writes, **This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds**

should be exposed (John 3:19–20). As it seems, some among the wicked of this world nevertheless set forth their works in the light, at which time the name of God is rather to be glorified (Is. 24:15).

Such indignities, of course, are visited on others every day; others of less prominence or no notoriety at all—many nameless sufferers dying at the hands of lawless men—and so you might ask, “Why address this particular incident, rather than another?” Iryna Zarutka was stabbed to death on a train in Charlotte, NC, and you heard nothing from me. Closer to home, Frank Harwood and John Morrison, were murdered on Canfield mountain responding to reports of a fire and, except for adding them to the Prayers of the Church, you heard nothing from me. Those instances are, in themselves, quite horrifying, yet we have come to expect random acts of violence that seem to have nothing else attached to them than unstable people killing certain persons for no apparent reason.

The assassination of Charlie Kirk in broad daylight on a college campus, however, is a Rubicon crossing. It was not just his jugular that the shooter took aim at, but what the young man’s voice was able to say so convincingly to so many. And that, not only about categories of reality that we, as Christians, ought to support such as the Right to Life, along with the Scriptural view of Holy Marriage and other matters related to identity, but even and especially about the Lord Jesus Christ, the reality of the resurrection, the veracity of the Bible, and the hope of the life of the world to come. Charlie Kirk was an Evangelical, of course, but he articulated very many articles of faith well. One such confession of his was “Jesus defeated death so you can live.” We can say “Amen” to this with much gladness and confidence of heart.

This is not a letter, then, to endorse everything Charlie Kirk has ever said or published as a prominent public figure. It really is not intended to endorse him at all, but to note that, symbolically, the man who murdered Charlie Kirk took aim, not only at his jugular and voice, but at a broader view of the world that we, as Lutheran Christians, profess and believe. As a consequence, reactions to an incident like this are varied, ranging from gut-wrenching to fear to rage.

It is quite gut-wrenching to think that a young Christian man of 31, newly married with two children was shot dead such that his wife will not be held by him again; his children will not remember him, will not know him. It is a fearful thing to consider that such wickedness was propagated so openly and blatantly; what’s more, vicious people celebrated it after the fact. It is enraging because the intent in killing such a one as Charlie Kirk is to assert against the foolishness of what we preach in the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet the Christian is not to weep as those without hope, nor is he to fear the one who can kill the body, but not the soul, nor is he to be enraged beyond propriety. Christ bore the stripes, the wounds, the lies, the mockery, and yet replies, "All this I gladly suffer." And the Christian, in reflection upon the Holy Cross replies, "As ought I, O Lord." The world hates you because it hated Christ first. Do not forget this lest in the reactivity of the heart, you incline interiorly more to vengeance than repentance and prayer.

Righteous indignation in the face of such evils is understandable, of course, but it must give way to repentance for your own sin. Just such situations as this does our Lord Jesus address in Luke 13:1–5. I commend to your meditation these words of our Lord Jesus so that you are not simply given to anger, but repentance, which finally turns to faith and looks to Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the life of the world to come; that looks to Christ and overcomes fear with the assurance that our lives are already hidden away in God with Him (Col. 3:3).

Bernard of Cluny wrote:

*The world is very evil,
The times are waxing late;
Be sober and keep vigil,
The Judge is at the gate;
The judge that comes in mercy,
The Judge that comes with might,
To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right. (TLH 605, stz., 1)*

Though this public tragedy is a Rubicon crossing, let us not forecast the future, but trust in the mercy of our Lord Jesus who has not only shed His blood for our redemption, giving us the hope of the life of the world to come, but will also vindicate those who have been wronged by others, whether in thought, word, or deed. He will diadem-crown-the righteous, even as He takes those who die in Him to Himself.

Because Charlie Kirk was also a prominent political figure, the coverage of this event is likely to be filled with how the politically-minded tend to react, which is not always in keeping with what Sacred Scripture commends to the Christian. The Word of God commends the following against the reactivity of the flesh in the face of evil committed:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” says the Lord...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17–21).

The fifth stanza for the aforementioned hymn from *Walther’s Hymnal* is a prayer to the Suffering Christ:

*Help us like Thee to face
All pain and tribulation,
And as we bear our cross,
Keep us from desperation.
Grant by Thy crown of thorns
That with a patient mood
We may endure the loss
Of honor, name, and blood.*

Pray for the state of things, dear Christians, for our leaders and all who make, administer, judge, and enforce our laws, so that we, in turn, would live quiet and peaceable lives. Love one another as God in Christ loves you. Give thanks to God for the preservation of your life and for the lives of Christians lost in tragedy, for, truly, they have passed from death to life, even as the Truth is in our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for the dutiful execution of justice against the wicked, yet also for the wicked one’s repentance from dead works unto the life that is in our Lord. Guard the interior motions of your heart and let it be guided by the Word of God, not hysterics. All is yours in Christ Jesus and should you suffer for the sake of His name, count yourself blessed.

*Arise, arise, good Christian,
Let right to wrong succeed;
Let penitential sorrow
To heav’nly gladness lead,
To light that hath no evening,
That knows no moon nor sun,
The light so new and golden,
The light that is but one.* (TLH 605, stz., 2).

Yours in our Lord,
Pr. Williams