

TORONTO MARCH FOR LIFE

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Romans 12:1-2, 9-13

Is death the solution to the problems of life? Our culture, our government, basically the whole world answers yes. For them, death is the compassionate relief of suffering; it is a way of having some control of your own life, to have freedom, to be dignified, as they say. This way of thinking is so pervasive that many Christians are influenced by it, so that the baby in the womb is seen as nothing more than a clump of extra cells, or sending grandma early to see Jesus is the right thing to do.

Such thinking is wrong, not only because it lacks compassion for the elderly and dying and not recognizing the baby as a precious gift and blessing, but also because it lacks a right understanding of God, not recognizing him as THE life, the God of the living. In the world's view, life should be free from the crosses of affliction and suffering, but in the Christian's view, life is lived under the cross, but always in Christ.

The apostle Paul beautifully articulates the message of the cross in the first half of the letter to the Romans. The message of the cross is that although we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," we are "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24). Because of our sin we all deserve shame, condemnation, and hell, not the glory of God. God, however, left his glory and, in the person of Jesus, suffered the wrath we deserved as he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" By believing and trusting that Jesus died on the cross for us, we have forgiveness of our sins and are seen by God as being "good." As St. Paul writes, "...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 3:22).

The message of the cross is that God revealed the great depth of his love for the whole world by suffering, and by his resurrection he gives life, showing that life is a gift and a great blessing. This is foolishness to the world, but faith has a different perspective. The world sees that nothing good can come from suffering, and to the extreme, that life has no meaning and purpose. The world is plagued by brokenness and despair. Yet, faith sees a God who suffers and dies because he considers us precious in his sight and through the cross, he actually brought restoration through the forgiveness of sins. Is death the solution to the problems of life? Yes! But it is in the death of the Son of God! He suffered and died for the forgiveness of sins. It is for all people, for all those who suffer and contemplate and struggle with suicidal thoughts, for all those who have killed their unborn child, for all those who have perhaps helped in ending a life, for those who are influenced by the world or by their own selfish desires to despise life, there is forgiveness for all those who live in this shame and guilt. God has washed you and cleansed you of all your sins by the blood of Jesus.

And since we have been washed, we are renewed and transformed to live differently than the world expects. Therefore, Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...” (Romans 12:2). To conform to the pattern of the world is to think and behave the way the world does. But we are changed, renewed, transformed by the working of God! Life under the cross is lived differently because of who we are—redeemed and beloved children of God.

That does not mean we will always live accordingly, as Paul says earlier in chapter 7, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). Life under the cross, however, means that we live in grace and are renewed daily in the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for our sins once and for all. Our transformation has begun when we were united in his death and resurrection through baptism. The renewal is constant and sure because it is God’s work, so that, we do “let love be genuine, abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9). This is then followed by nine descriptions (not imperatives/commands) of the new life in Christ in verses 10-13.

Because we are renewed and transformed by God, we can also live differently in the face of pain and suffering and indeed, more than that, we now truly live. It is a life that lives to God, in service to the neighbor. Indeed, the world around us is constantly teaching us to see those who are suffering or just being elderly as a burden, and even the unplanned pregnancy and having a child is undesirable and an obstacle to your personal freedom. But we have been transformed to see things differently, to see the truth. We do not see people as burdens, whether young or old or otherwise. We do not see those who are frail and vulnerable as a burden; rather, we carry their burdens, we love them, we pray for them, and we help them, as Paul says in verse 10: “loving one another in brotherly love, excelling one another in honor.”

Paul continues in the next verse, saying that “not being lazy in zeal, being fervent in the spirit, slaving in the Lord.” We are to be constantly serving our neighbor because we are so filled with the spirit, so filled with Christ, so filled with his life. We show the world that life is not meaningless or purposeless, a life that is only filled with the self, but rather, that life is good because it lives under the cross.

Because it lives under the cross of Jesus, it is a life that is “rejoicing in the hope, enduring in the suffering, persisting in prayer” (verse 12). We rejoice in the hope because of the many great promises God has given us in Christ Jesus, and he will never fail us. And this hope is not just something far away in the future that we only have at the very end, but it is with us today because Christ is with us until the end of the age. There is hope in God’s providence and care even as we suffer. There’s hope that God will work all things for good, to bring repentance and faith to those around us. There’s hope because everything is still under God’s control. In this we rejoice. Therefore, we also endure in suffering because we have hope and prayer. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that this description of the Christian life is sandwiched between rejoicing in hope and prayer. We suffer, but we do not suffer alone. Christ is with us, and therefore, we suffer with one another, bearing one another’s burden. Likewise, our prayer is not just for ourselves but for others as well. Remember those who are with child, those who are elderly, those who are sick.

Finally, we offer actual help as Paul concludes in the last verse: “sharing in the needs of the saints, striving to show love for the stranger.” And this is what we are doing today. We are marching and protesting, not because we want to show off how righteous and holy we are, but because we care.

The world hates us for this. But let them not discourage us and let not their lies threaten us. This is a way to show our love for the neighbor, and I pray that it may embolden your faith to do the same in your own personal vocations.

This is the transformed life we have that is lived under the cross, which is radically different than what the world offers and teaches. It is a life of sacrifice, putting the needs of others before our own. It is a life of joyful hope, even in the midst of pain and suffering. It is a life of patient endurance in affliction because of the knowledge that God's love is at work in our suffering. It is a life of faithful prayer because we know we have a merciful and understanding God. It is a life of service to one another in love.

Is death the solution to the problems of life? Life under the cross is the solution. Killing and murder solves nothing, but in the death of the son of God there is true life, and with it, hope and salvation. Let this great gift continually transform us so that God may bring his light in us and through us into this world.