

CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL ASSISTANTS, SFO - OCEANIA

c/- Star of the Sea Friary
45 Victoria St, Waverley NSW
Australia 2024

Phone: (61-2) 9369 9361
Fax: (61-2) 9389 4067
E-mail: cschafer@franciscans.org.au

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE CROSS

“The language of the cross may be illogical to those who are not on the way to salvation, but those of us who are on the way see it as God’s power to save” (I Cor. 1:18).

There are some words that we do not want to hear because they tend to upset us or frighten us or even invade our sleep. I remember as I was learning to cook one of my friends bought me the latest cook book by the great Margaret Fulton. I took that book to my room and read at least half of it by midnight. After I put it down and turned off the light, I went into a deep sleep and in my dreams I had recipes invading my mind. I could not turn them off. Eventually they went and I slept peacefully.

The language of the cross can be offensive to many people. The cross stands for death. It is a precise language and it had a meaning for the Jews and pagans of Jesus’ time, therefore, for the first Christian community as well. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini writes, *“For the Jews, death on the wood of the Cross clearly demonstrated that God had abandoned an individual. The dramatic way with which St Matthew’s Gospel presents the crucifixion emphasizes this solitude and abandonment. The last words of Jesus come from Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Journey with the Lord, p.114.)*

In Matthew’s gospel, the first line of Psalm 22 presents the *“cry of the virtuous man”*, but without hatred or rebellion. Jesus uses this Psalm to reveal how far his Father was willing to go to show us how much he loves us, by allowing his Son to offer his suffering for us and by accepting the fullness of alienation that sin brings about. It is not a word of desperation or loss of hope, but a word that draws the Father’s attention even more intimately towards his Son. His Son’s cry and anguish move the Father who cries for his Son, who offers himself for love of us in his humanity for our humanity to his Father, so that we can be recreated into the original image in which we were made and had the Spirit poured into our hearts. This Spirit when we listen to his voice cries out from the depth of our hearts to the same Father, *“Abba Father.”* He speaks with unimaginable love and tenderness, so that our Father will hear the voice and groans of the Spirit pleading for us.

For the pagans and the Jews, the cross pointed out just how foolish and absurd was Christ’s pretence at being the Messiah, that man of God. In the eyes of the Greeks and pagans, the qualitative value of the crucifixion could not in any way be of value to God. The crucifixion has nothing of the power and omnipotence which ought to characterize divinity. Rather, for them it is the demonstration of the inferiority and weakness of those who believe in the cross and in Jesus as the Son of God. They cannot envision God or a hero in the

crucifixion. Christ's death on the cross is completely devoid of any good, unless one is on the "...road to salvation." If not, one can only see gross insult, blood, darkness and cruelty.

The death of Jesus on the cross seems all the less divine the more one has a sublime idea of what is divine, of a God who is incapable of participating in the affairs of this world and unable to suffer or have compassion on those inferior to him. The cross puts our values and conceptions, whether of the human or of the divine, into crisis. And this crisis is only overcome when, in the light of the Resurrection, we have the courage to look with faith upon the crucifixion and see that in it God's power and wisdom lie, along with his justice and tenderness, and our sanctification and redemption.

In the contemplation and adoration of the cross we can see the perfect way towards our deliverance, through obedience and freedom to embrace our cross after the imitation of Jesus. To accept our cross means sacrifice, love and abandonment into Christ's arms that remain open for us on the cross to remind us that he always welcomes us, no matter how often we stray from his path to Calvary.

Let us ask Mary our Mother who held Jesus as a baby with immense tenderness, and as she held his dead body, to pray to Jesus for us that we do not abandon our cross.

Fr. John Spiteri Ofm Cap.
National Spiritual Assistant SFO-Oceania

Regional Assistants are requested to distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all local Assistants of our Order in the Regional Fraternity.