

# The world is in shambles, so cling to the cross



September is a sorrowful month in the Church. Or at least the Church calendar would indicate so. Just like June has back-to-back feast days of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, September commemorates the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows one after another on Sept. 14 and 15, respectively.

As I've mentioned in previous columns, I never paid much attention to Church feast days until the nature of my job forced me to, and praise God for that. While I might have remembered particular feast days of my personal patrons, I was missing the richness that the full calendar provides Catholics, a rhythm for our lives.

These two feast days in particular seem to be perfectly timed this year as our country – and world – wrestles with old and new wounds: the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks on our nation; the August takeover of Kabul by the Taliban; the continuation of a pandemic and the personal tension and decisions that come with it; all the way down to the individual struggles we endure as fallen people struggling with concupiscence and striving to follow God, especially when it's not easy.

I've had my own cross recently, and while it's too private to share here, it's given me an opportunity to wrestle with this call as Christians to unite our sorrows and struggles to the cross of Jesus Christ. It's easy to hear the words, "Take up your cross and follow me," but, as we all know, it's much harder to live that out, especially when we see how our crosses affect others. Sin is not isolated. But neither is

grace. And it's this second part that I need to cling to.

A day before writing this column, I texted a priest friend asking if he was free and able to meet with me for confession and counseling. Praise the Lord that I didn't convince myself the situation could wait, because his words gave purpose and perspective to my struggle. What I needed to be reminded of was that there is a real spiritual battle going on, something we often forget in the midst of our everyday trials. But the spiritual world is real, more real in a sense than our corporeal world. And when we realize that our personal, finite struggles can be used to help in the spiritual battle – well, it might not make everything feel good, but there is a certain burden lifted, because suffering has purpose. Our pain can be offered for those we have hurt or who have hurt us. It can be offered for tragic situations around the world, either personal or distant. It can be given to the Blessed Mother and Our Lord to do with as the please. We don't have to know how our suffering is put to good use for the kingdom, but we can rest assured that it doesn't go to waste.



Our Lady of Sorrows. Public

Speaking of the Blessed Mother, she is my heartbeat when the going gets tough, one Hail Mary at a time. My daily Rosary often turns into two, and sometimes more, especially if I pray the Rosary led by the Dominican Sisters of Mary Mother of the Eucharist in their recording on Spotify, allowing all four mysteries to be prayed in succession. The meditations offered by the sisters, especially for the Sorrowful Mysteries, have helped me reclaim a glimmer of peace when all seems lost or a resolution to remain steadfast in faith even when it's the more difficult route. And knowing Our Lady of Sorrows has endured the greatest loss through the death of her son reminds me that she is familiar with grief and she is familiar with offering up her own sufferings.

As Pope Benedict is famously quoted as saying: "The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness." Yes, we were made for greatness, for sainthood, but purification is messy. It's slow, it's heart wrenching, it's not straightforward. And we mess up – a lot – in the process of getting it right. But our mistakes and our sorrows can be redeemed. They can have purpose. And so we cling to grace and Jesus' promise that his yoke is easy and his burden light.

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