

We have now traversed four Sundays in Lent as we walk along with Christ towards his death on the cross. Today is Passion Sunday and we meditate on, "The meaning of the death of Christ." What does the death of Christ mean to us? What does it indicate? What sense can we make out of a man who was crucified 2000 years ago along with criminals on a cruel cross? Does his death alter our lives in any way? These are some of the questions which run through our minds when we think about the death of Christ.

When we look at the scriptures, Paul writing to the Romans tells that, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But then he goes on to say, "they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23-26)." Paul shows that through the death of Christ the redemption is available to all who believe in Christ. God put forward Jesus to die for our sins so that we can make peace with God.

If Christ has indeed died for our sins then what are the implications for us? Paul believes that the death of Christ makes him persuade others to respond to the good news. The word persuade can also mean 'to appeal' or 'to cajole' and therefore Paul makes every effort to share in the ministry of reconciliation. In the work of evangelism human beings are partners with the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and therefore Paul appeals to his listeners to respond to the grace of God.

The death of Christ removes sin and makes us right before God. Even though God's wrath was upon us because of our sins and we deserved to die, God did not allow us to face that wrath. It is in the cross of Christ that we see the wrath being dealt with. Christ takes upon himself the wrath of God that was directed against sin.

Secondly, the death of Christ is for the sake of all people. Caiaphas the high priest that year said that it is better for one man to die for the people than the whole nation to perish. Jesus did not die only for the sins of the Jewish nation or for Christians, but his death is for the sake of the whole world. Salvation has been made available to everyone because of his death. But we are called to receive and accept his forgiveness individually. Thirdly, the death of Christ challenges us to live our life for the sake of others. We are no longer to live our lives for ourselves but for the sake of Christ.

Paul reminds us that because of the death of Christ we are a new creation and ministers of reconciliation. Because of this we do not see others from a worldly point of view. In other words we will not be impressed by the externals of what we see but rather be concerned with the heart of the person. That is why Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come!" We are called to walk in the Spirit in the new life and not according to our fleshly desires. Truth and integrity will be part of our lives. Lies and deceit have to go. The old habits have to go. The self has to die; Power and Pride, Popularity and Success, Wealth and Greed all need to go from our lives. Instead we are called to lead lives of humility, integrity and simplicity.

Because of the death of Christ we ourselves have found meaning for our lives. Christ has removed our sin and made us right before God. We are now challenged to live our lives for the sake of others. Since we are a new creation our old sinful habits have to leave us and we must exemplify Christ in our lives. We are called to be the ministers of reconciliation sharing the good news with others so that they too may find meaning in their lives through the death of Christ.