

Heavy is the cross

It was the night before Collin's third altar serving experience. Overall, he's been comfortable holding the book for Father to read from, collecting the gifts, and assisting with the preparation of the Eucharist. But, the one thing he hasn't done yet is carry the cross to and from the altar to signal the beginning and end of Mass. Collin wondered if he would be called to bear the cross on this particular Sunday. He was worried.

"It's so heavy!" he told me as I was cleaning up our Saturday evening spaghetti dinner. "I'm so afraid I'm going to drop it!"

"You will be *fine*," I told Collin. "Maybe we can practice."

The closest thing I could find to the cross was a broom. He proceeded across the kitchen and through the living room while I hummed "Gather Us In." After a few go-rounds, he retired to bed, still anxious about the daunting task that tomorrow might bring.

"It's so much heavier than the broom," he said, as he drifted off to sleep.

Father Cunningham (who was visiting us) and Deacon Ray Van Pelt greeted Collin and my mom in the sacristy. Collin told them he wasn't sure if he was ready to carry the cross, but that Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry his cross. He was ready to do the same.

It worked out that Ellen, an experienced altar server who was brave enough to play Annie in a production of the same name with little preparation, carried the cross that Sunday. Collin was relieved, and after Mass he took some time to practice lifting high the cross because he knows that soon it will be his turn.

The reality is that the cross we as Catholics have chosen and have been chosen to bear is heavy and growing heavier. Chances are, it's not going to get any lighter or easier in the near future. So, what can we do? We can practice carrying the cross by evangelizing and by standing up for our faith when it is questioned in public or online. We can ask for help from clergy and other people of faith when we feel as though the cross is too heavy and we feel it start to slip. Above all, we must ask ourselves, "What is the cross I have been asked to bear and how will I carry it?"