

The Way of the Cross

It is gut-wrenching to try to understand violent behavior and the senseless outcomes. While it challenges our conventional wisdom, each act of violence that lay on the floors of our war-ravished cities and countries, serves to shatter our illusions. They often serve as great moments of transformation. Even closer to home, we suffer the effects of diminished hope as our children and other innocent victims lie in our streets. The crucifixion of Christ on the cross emulates the divine power and the wisdom of God. This is just a glimpse of what is done spiritually by those who will be saved. As said in the Book of Romans, we choose to live with Christ so we must die with Christ. Christian history offers us another perspective of the same message.

The mystic way of the desert fathers and mothers of the third and fourth century serves as a beacon of hope to recapture our deepest desires. Modeling after Jesus, many men and women chose to disengage from the crisis of the Roman Empire and retreat into the desert. There, conquering temporal time, they mastered disciplines of detachment, fasting, personal deprivation, solitude, silence, continual prayer and contemplation. They were set apart as men and women of sanctification and wisdom. This ascetic way to God proved to dismantle the priorities of many a warrior.

The desert fathers and mothers believed that anyone could be utilized by God. St. Moses the Black was an amazing God bearer. He came through a life of slavery and violence and was said to have committed many evils. He chose the monastic life of the desert. St. Moses the Black surrendered to the precepts and examples of God as his only principle and authority. It was not easy for him. One of my favorite stories of St. Moses the Black has to do with just how far his precepts of Christ were challenged. It has a particular important message for us today. St. Moses the Black was invited to a gathering. Many there did not appreciate his presence. They openly mocked his skin, clothing and mannerisms. As he was leaving, one of the guests ran after him and asked him what he was he thinking in the face of such open hostility to his presence. St. Moses the Black looked at him and simply said, "I was thinking, 'but Jesus kept his peace.' " His experience of the desert proved a safe place to unmask his ego and surrender to the mind of Christ. St. Moses the Black became a leader and a priest. He wrote rules for the monks, martyrs and saints whose ways of

proceeding have so heavily influenced the revelation of the Triune God within each of us today.

The life of St. Moses the Black has much to say to us in the face of violence today. How do we begin to understand the plight of pilgrims who suffer in less than fortunate circumstances? How do we penetrate their protective behavioral strategies? Strategies often developed in response to continuous adverse interactions. We are each fellow pilgrims of the Way. We are invited to examine our conscience daily.

We need to take every opportunity that we can to hear each other's stories. It is only then that we can unveil the presence of God in our own lives. Circumstances of survival color our perception as well as our knowledge of the environment in which we live.

It is said that an easy religion is not the way to heaven, but the way to hell. Ours is an active faith. We can't sit and study the cross without realizing that there is a personal message here for each of us. We are often called to wrestle with vice.

The experience of the desert fathers and mothers reminds us that we can bring all of our imperfections, ambiguities as well as our right arrogance before God. God uses it all to build his kingdom. Before the cross, we recognize and own the deepest desire. The desire is to return to him as warriors of the Way.

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