

ST. PAUL: MAN OF THE CROSS, MAN ON THE CROSS

“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20)

It is within this elegant and powerful statement that St. Paul passionately captures the essence of the True Cross experience. In this verse, Paul defines himself, as all Initiates must, as those who are both of the Cross and on it as we journey Homeward, shedding who we think we are for who we Truly are along the way.

Paul was unique among the Apostles as he was the first that did not know Jesus “in the flesh.” For this reason he did not see Jesus with human eyes, so easily deceived, but was able to discern beyond appearances, especially those of the physical suffering witnessed by others of the faithful during that Good Friday at Calvary. Lifted up in this way beyond the veil of the flesh, Paul was able to see into the more exalted nature and necessity of the Cross not only for Christ Jesus, but for the exposure of Christ in himself and all mankind.

Paul was unique and singular in that he was the first of the Apostles to teach the centrality of the Cross Mystery, that of crucifixion and resurrection. None of the original 12 had or transmitted this awareness until they heard it from Paul. In a very real sense, the revealing of the Cross Mystery may have been hidden from the original 12 Apostles because of their earthbound, flesh and blood experience of Jesus. As Initiates, we may ask ourselves if we are influenced in the same way. What keeps us from taking up our own Cross daily as Jesus Christ directed? Do we fear the “flesh and blood” aspect of the Cross endured by Him while concealing the True Nature of the Cross experience? Is the suffering and agony we fear a spectre of our own making?

As we make our transition from Kingdom 2 to Kingdom 3 consciousness, the message and presence of St. Paul can act as a bridge, for lack of a better term. While we follow Jesus Christ and look toward that consciousness, St. Paul stands with us and we can look from the awareness that he gave to the early churches and to the world. As Initiates, where we find a chasm between our current consciousness and the Cross we are meant to bear in order to enter higher realms, St. Paul's mission and message help us span it.

Paul's journey is an episode of our own. As with all Biblical characters, we are, will be, or have been each of them in consciousness as we return to our "Homepoint" as Emma Curtis Hopkins describes it. Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, was raised in and was a product of the law. Dogma, doctrine, material privilege and anti-Christian mindset were his stock and trade by "the blood and body of his ancestors." However, something deep in his soul craved Truth enough to accept his first Cross: his experience and ensuing awakening on the road to Damascus. Each of us has had a similar experience in order to attain the level of consciousness we now experience. We will have others as we look toward consciousness even higher. We have all had Old Testament consciousness, "the law," crucified in us so that the New Testament ideal of Love may be exposed and brought forth. We have all had illusions nailed to the Cross to light our way with Truth. We have all experienced the resurrection that only comes with the crucifixion of error, duality and matter-hypnosis at various levels.

St. Paul stood not only for the Purpose of the Cross experience, but for the essential element of Its Passion. His personal experience was so profound and so consciousness-altering that he spent the rest of his earthly life preaching and giving testament to it. The early Christian churches, each with their own ethos, proclivities and doctrines all received Truth messages through his epistles. This Passion, fully present and active both in Christ Jesus and St. Paul is the atmosphere in which Truth is exposed and Christhood is incubated in each one of us. It is the Passion of the Cross that dissolves any illusion of suffering and sets us about our Fathers business.

One of the subtle yet vital messages present in St. Paul's ministry was the Ideal that a message of Truth, spoken genuinely and authentically, overarches any condition, circumstance or appearance. For the Corinthians, much given divisiveness as well as idol and personality worship, Paul asks "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1Cor. 1:13) To the Romans, still influenced by the polytheism and political structures of the old empire consciousness, Paul stated, "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." (Rom. 6:6) For the Galatians, immersed in the idea of human works as substitute for an inner life based upon the Ideal of Being, Paul offers "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal. 5:24) To the Philippians, prosperous, generous but proud and earthbound in their consciousness, St. Paul offers, "For as I have often told you before and now tell you again with tears, many live as enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things but our citizenship is in Heaven." (Phil. 3:18-20)

As Initiates, what demands our attention is that all of the churches mentioned here, as well as the others that Paul ministered to, all represent "churches," realms of thought, ideas, histories, etc., bound up in each human mind and in our emotions. All of those elements that have forged out our human personalities including ancestral and societal influences, opinion, lifetimes of earthly experience, and so much more form our own personal religions, the "church" in each of where we worship in different ways. Consciously and subconsciously, the accumulated journey of many lifetimes creates "the church of me" where each of us goes to the altar. In an esoteric sense, this is the "church" that St. Paul addresses in his letters to the early Christian churches. It is also this "church" of our own "me-ness" that he urges us to take up our own Cross to purify, just as he did.

We, as Initiates, and St. Paul are truly kindred spirits. While always willing to take up his next Cross, he struggled throughout his life with duality, anger, ill-health and human frailty just as we all do. Even in the midst, St. Paul always knew

the saving Grace of transformation, integration and resurrection that was and is the mighty promise of the Cross for those that are willing. The Cross is the place where the “hope of Glory” is fulfilled in us. It is the place where the hand of God as the husbandman may do its work in us. Always the example, Jesus Christ portrayed the work on the Cross in Jn. 15:1-2. “I am the True Vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”