

Holy Cross Day 2020

Imagine you have been given a car, a really lovely car. Maybe an Aston Martin. But over the years it has been through the wars. To cut costs, you have taken it to local mechanics which hasn't kept it in the best of shape. And then one day you have a bad accident. Thankfully no-one is injured, but the car is completely written off.

Again you take it to the local garage. Do you remember Haynes manuals? I had one for all of my first 4 cars. Haynes Manuals were car repair books which told you how to repair everything from a split manifold to a fan belt. Well, just as he always does, your local mechanic get out their old copy of the Haynes manual for your Aston Martin with its missing pages and tatty edges. Some of the pages have been replaced with notes from other models. The mechanic ensures you that he will figure it all out and have it up and running again – though deep down you lament that your car may be lost forever, at least as it had been on that first day you brought it.

Then quite perchance, you meet the designer and chief engineer of the very same model of Aston Martin at a business fair the very next day. This is the very person who designed every inch of your car from new and oversaw its production. He tells you that he repairs these all the time as a side-line and he is convinced that he can have it looking better than new with upgraded extras. What is more, he will do it for cheaper than your local mechanic.

So, what do you do?

Do you leave your car where it is for the local guy to tinker, or do you give it to the chief engineer of Aston Martin?

This in a nutshell is an analogy for the Christian faith. This is what makes the narrative of Christianity so compelling.

You see, the example of the local bodge-it mechanic, using bits and pieces of information and previous knowledge to try and patch up the damage, is us and the world we create around us. We constantly try and come up with new ways to fix the old damage and decay, but without a complete 360 degree understanding of what we are mending. We use a Haynes manual with pages missing. This is in fact true for everything from the economy to the natural world to the human body.

But the scenario of the designer and chief engineer is the story of God's intervention into our broken world through Jesus. The damage done to humanity and the natural world since its creation, is by and large our fault. To follow the analogy, we haven't looked after the precious car we have been given and we have driven it off the road.

But in Jesus, God our creator gives us the perfect fix for our broken lives and the broken world around us. In Jesus, we see an ideal that we all know, deep down, provides us with the answer to our otherwise decaying existence.

Now, of course, we fail to hit the heights that Jesus exemplifies; all of us do. We see ourselves failing and it frustrates us. We see others failing and we use it as an excuse to stop trying, saying; 'well if that is what Christians are like, why bother?'

And yet we notice that when we turn our backs on Christ, when we attack his Body on earth or decide to have no part in it, the world becomes a darker place. The alternatives all fall short and we become aware that we are only papering over the cracks of the great chasms in our souls. Somehow life loses true meaning, pleasure is fleeting and joy hollow.

Others will of course fall short of the ideal that Jesus sets, just as we will – we're all broken, vulnerable, wounded. So be careful who you judge or attack. A part of our own healing rests in our ability to both support and build-up the Body of Christ on earth. Christ comes to us both individually and collectively. We must keep on striving for the ideal Jesus sets, whilst helping others to do the same, from within and building up the community which he gives us, the Church.

In the glorious vision of our Incarnate Lord, we see humanity as it is truly meant to be. In Christ, we see reflected the credentials of our creator God; not only willing to intervene in the messiness of the world, but willing to enter the most impoverished places, confront the most difficult situations, stand up to the pernicious forces that suppress and shackle the freedom of the weaker more disadvantaged. All the while willing to make himself vulnerable by entering the human form and ultimately sacrificing his very life, in order to show what true service looks like and give us access to his eternal grace. Only this self-giving, compassionate God has the power to turn the cross, this symbol of torture, into the symbol of resurrection hope.

Christ offers us the hope and means by which our brokenness can be healed. It does not matter how often we miss the mark, he remains constant and his forgiveness is never ending – there is always a route back to his grace if we can let go of our pride and find the humility to truly recognise our own vulnerability and brokenness, and lay it before him. This constant re-formation within us, enables us to be re-built again and again so that together with the world around us we may continue to grow into that glorious corporate body, only the creator can repair and refashion.

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