

My dear St. Stephen brothers and sisters,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus!

In the coming weeks, the work of repairing and beautifying our ceiling will begin. In order to complete the needed tasks, the workers will lower our cross and the risen Lord. As soon as we complete the necessary work, we will relocate the cross in the narthex, where it will stand as a beautiful memorial to James AmRhein, the original donor of the cross, and to all the deceased of the parish. A crucifix will be installed on the wall of our sanctuary. I assure you it will be beautiful. Our new arrangement, with the crucifix above our altar and the sign of eternal life at our entrance and exit will give expression to the fullness of the mystery of our faith: *we die with Christ so that we might rise with him on the last day.*

I realize that the current cross has an iconic value in our parish. Please understand that I did not make the decision for the change arbitrarily or without much consultation, prayer, and consideration of the role this resurrection cross has played in the life of our parish. I discerned liturgical, biblical, and spiritual reasons for the change.

First, The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the text in which the Church establishes all the elements of the proper celebration of the Mass, clearly calls for a cross above or near the altar with the body of the *crucified Lord* on it. This is because, first, the Mass is the **memorial of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary**. Whenever we proclaim the death of the Lord, the work of our redemption is completed. This is precisely what we do at Mass under the sign of the cross.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1366) teaches us: *The Eucharist is...a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the **sacrifice of the cross**, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit:*

*[Christ], our Lord, and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the **altar of the cross**, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper "on the night when he was betrayed," [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice...by which **the bloody sacrifice which he was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit.***

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The victim is one and the same: ...In this divine sacrifice, which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner. (1367)

The Eucharist is the enactment *here and now* of Christ's once-for-all sacrificial death on the cross on that Friday of 2,000 years ago. In the Eucharist, Christ takes our lives, works, relationships, and experiences unto himself and presents them as an offering to our Father in heaven.

This *in no way* downplays or denies Christ's glorious resurrection, but to point out the price Jesus paid for our salvation. At the same time, the crucifix reminds us that the way of discipleship is to *die with Christ that we may rise victorious with him*.

Having the crucifix before us as we offer the sacrifice of the Mass helps to make our own the words of St. Paul who wrote to the Corinthians: *we preach Christ crucified* (1Cor 1:23); and to the Galatians: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (6:14).

This is the essence of our faith and of true Christian spirituality. Before we can rejoice in the resurrection, we must follow the Lord to the cross and offer our lives through, with, and in the self-offering of Christ. We do this whenever we participate in the sacrifice of the Mass, and when we make a daily offering of ourselves with Christ in loving service to God and to others.

Again, this does not deny the resurrection. In fact, the proper, living sign of the resurrection is **you and I**--particularly when we approach the Eucharistic table to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion. We become what we receive: namely, the Body of Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen, and glorified. You and I become a living sign of the presence of the risen Lord.

Going out from the sacrifice of the Mass, we proclaim Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, and alive among us. As we depart into the narthex, the cross of the risen one will remind us of the eternal life we look forward to. This is the symbolism of our Celtic cross: eternal life in and through the cross of Christ.

As a further benefit, the new placement of our cross will help us create a powerful setting for the opening rites of funerals. It will give to the bereaved families and friends a powerful reminder of the hope of eternal life beyond death that we share in Christ.

As we go forward with the repair and renewal of our parish home, let us also go forward together in faith with our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered and died then rose for us and calls us to share in his eternal life and glory!

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Fr. George