

The Lord preached the cross to the unbelieving Jews. They were offended. They were scandalized. They were caught up in their unbelief and hatred of Him. They hated Him even after they crucified Him.

The Lord came to bring salvation to His people—the Jews, through preaching: Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand—and that he would have to suffer and die, and 3 days later rise from the dead. They refused to believe and are still waiting for the Messiah's first coming, which they missed 2,000 years ago.

Only after the Jews rejected Him did His message reach the Gentiles. As the blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John writes: **John 1:10-13** “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

The Lord was first revealed to the Gentiles at the great Epiphany, and He continues to be revealed through the proclamation of the cross to this very day, to all corners of the earth.

This is why the cross is offensive. The cross is offensive because the Gospel is offensive. More literally, the preaching of the cross is scandalous.

This is what happens to someone who hears the preaching of the cross and is offended by it, considering it foolishness. The unbeliever is caught in his own trap, the religion of the Law, the religion of works. This is the same trap that scandalizes us.

Our sinful nature thinks the preaching of the cross is blasphemy, we think it is foolishness. We want to hear something better. **Timothy 4:3** “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”

Works righteousness is a plague that eats away at our souls because its basic tenet is that we can get to heaven if we are good enough—if we have performed enough good works. This is offensive to Christ, for this false teaching seeks to rob the cross of its power.

But we are made foolish by the foolishness of the preaching of the cross, for it is how the Triune God in His far superior and infinite wisdom communicates His Word and His will to us.

But rather than looking to God's Word, we look to ourselves, looking for a sign outside the divinely-ordained signs of God's grace: His Word and Sacraments. We are offended at such ordinary words and ordinary elements.

We live in an increasingly intolerant and hostile society that is also offended by the cross. The world has no use for the cross, except to wear it as jewelry.

The world lives as if Jesus Christ had remained in the tomb, for the world does not want to accept the reality that Jesus Christ, by His death and resurrection, is the only Way, Truth, and Life.

The world considers it foolishness that one Man would be the only Way to heaven.

So, the wise, the scribes, and the debaters in this world put forth false gods. Yet their gods are only henchmen for the devil. Mohammed did not die for you. Buddha is still dead. Vishnu has not risen from the dead.

Despite the best efforts of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, the cross is still the enduring symbol of the hope that we have, the hope that is ours in Christ.

As we heard in last Sunday's gospel—we need to hear today: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent and cling to God's forgiveness.

Our hope endures, for the preaching of the cross has endured for 2000 years. This preaching has endured since Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame.

He endured by being obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Jesus, the holy One, became the lowly One for us and was lifted up on the cross. All who look to the crucified Christ in faith receive forgiveness of all their sins.

Look at the cross and remember what the Lord won there for you: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Jesus paid the entire debt of your sins. Your slate has been wiped clean by the blood of Jesus.

Your heavenly Father sees you through His only-begotten Son's blood and declares you righteous for Jesus' sake, for the very life He gave on the cross.

That is the reason for our joy. After He died, His body, once lifted up, was taken down and laid in the tomb.

He is not there. He is risen! The cross could not hold Him. The tomb could not contain Him. Death has no power over Him.

The resurrection of our Lord gives the preaching of the cross its power, and it is power for us who are being saved, as St. Paul tells us in our text.

This message is offensive to the devil and our sinful world. It is sheer foolishness to them who are perishing. But for us...we are being saved through the apostolic preaching of the cross.

We lift high the cross to tell others what He has done. We lift high the cross as we are marked with the sign of the cross.

We bear on our foreheads and on our hearts the sign of the cross that marks us as redeemed by Christ the crucified.

We have borne the sign of the cross from the day of our Baptism, where we became children of God.

We lift high the cross, telling others the message of the cross, so that they too, by the Holy Spirit, would no longer be offended—scandalized—but set free to be people of God, that they too would receive the gifts the Lord won on the cross and gives in His Word and Sacraments.

For our Lord presents His truth to us in His Word, the word of the cross. This is the message I preach, the word you get to hear, the good news we get to tell others. Every Sunday is Good Friday and Easter.

Without our Lord's bloody death and glorious resurrection, our faith would be in vain, and the Sacraments would be empty of their power. But thanks be to God who gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word who became flesh took on our human flesh and died, taking on our sins of the flesh (and of the mind and of the lips).

The Temple that was Christ's body was lifted up on the cross to take away the sin of the world. There He gave His body and shed His blood, In Word and in Sacraments, our Lord has established His presence.

It may not seem like much, as if these are mere words, plain water, ordinary bread and wine, and simple human flesh (as our Lord embodied).

But hear the words of St. Paul in our text: **1 Corinthians 1:23-28** “**We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** **²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.** **²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.** **²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;** **²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.”**

In the words of the great hymn: “Lift High the cross, the love of Christ proclaim Till all the world adore His sacred Name. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree, As Thou hast promised, draw us all to Thee. Lift high the cross....”

To aid us in this great task, our Lord placed His Trinitarian Name upon us, the Name into which we became baptized.

The Lord will guide you through his grace and mercy in the good days and bad days, whatever you are suffering or whatever your affliction is, he will never leave you or forsake you.

God's love never ceases.

With this Name we receive the sign of the cross to remind us of His great love for us and for all the world, that we may all adore His sacred Name.

This is the great Triumph of the Cross, that we will live into all eternity with Christ the crucified...and risen!