

I know this is Easter Day and I should be talking about resurrection, but I really can't do that without talking about crosses. One precedes the other. Jesus could not have been raised from the dead unless he was actually DEAD. There have been three places where I've seen crosses in my travels that have impressed me.

The first one is the cross of San Damiano. The original hangs in the basilica of St. Clare in Assisi, Italy. That is where I saw it. We have a replica of that cross in the chapel. In that icon, Jesus looks at you with wide, open eyes. His outstretched arms are strong and he is surrounded by the saints who adore him. This cross is about a risen Christ more than it is Jesus giving up His spirit.

This is the cross that Francis claimed spoke to him. Francis claimed that he heard Jesus tell him to rebuild his church. Francis first believed that Jesus meant the tumble-down chapel of San Damiano in which he stood. As Francis began to rebuild that little church he became aware that Jesus had the larger church in mind as well.

Back to Italy. I sat in the chapel at the basilica with other pilgrims and stared up at that cross. And, then, I had the audacity to say in my head “Do you have something to say to me?” (Oh right, Cricket, like you’re going to hear a voice.) Be careful what you pray for. Clear as a bell, these words came to me:

I know you. I love you.

I know you – I know all about you. I know the things you know about you and I know the things you want to hide from me and everyone else. I love you. **Not, I know you and I love you anyway.**

I love you.

Maybe, it’s not about being careful what you pray for.

Maybe, it’s “ask and you will receive”.

If you drive two hours northeast of London, you come to the city of Coventry. A person who isn’t knowledgeable of church history probably would say that it is the city of Lady Godiva and her famous horse ride. This church geek wanted to see the cathedral that she’d heard about from so many people.

The stark ruins of the World War II scourged cathedral are directly beside the modern re-build. They couldn't be more different.

The modern cathedral is a fantastic study of theology in art. Cascades of color come from the ceiling down to the baptismal font, which was created from a mammoth boulder brought there from the Holy Land. Walking through the nave you move from sin and judgment toward salvation. The hopeful messages are created by sculpture, glass, and a woven tapestry you need to see to believe. The cross above the altar is made of four nails that were recovered from the ruins. They are now the international symbol of the ministry of reconciliation, The Society of the Cross of Nails, as is the Cathedral itself.

Then, I walked into the ruins. As I came to the top of the steps I saw two charred wooden posts wired together placed atop the altar. In gold letters, the phrase "Father Forgive" is engraved in the wall behind it. Coming in from the modern structure, the devastation of the bombing was overwhelming. Nothing remained but the walls and the foundation. How could anyone forgive such an act of terror?

I walked through the cavernous space. Just like the modern structure, there are pieces of art throughout the ruins. That's when it occurred to me that I was on holy ground. It only appeared to be ruins – I was in a working sanctuary. One of the docents confirmed that the Church had not deconsecrated the ruins and that, in fact, they begin the Easter Vigil each year in front of those charred timbers. It gave me goosebumps.

Father, forgive.

Jesus' words from his cross.

Hate didn't win the battle of Coventry.

Love did.

Love always wins.

I'm sure that many of you watched with horror on Monday as the Cathedral of Notre Dame burned. It was a horrible way to begin Holy Week.

I visited Notre Dame in February of 2013. Honestly, Notre Dame is not my favorite cathedral. Canterbury holds that honor. But, still, it is beautiful.

The organ was playing "Christ is made the sure foundation" when I walked in. The gold cross and the statue of Mary with Jesus were draped with white, streamer-like, banners. The mid-day Mass had just ended.

I walked the length of the nave, said hello to Joan of Arc, and offered a prayer in one of the small chapels. Then, I put Notre Dame in my memory's photo album.

On Monday, though, all my memories came flooding back. Fire. Oh God, not fire. "The Rose Window!" I thought. "The relics! They'll all be gone!" They're not, of course, thanks to efforts of firefighters who brilliantly managed the salvation efforts. I felt sick to my stomach as I watched the flames consume centuries old oak timbers.

“Rain,” I pleaded with God. “Please send rain.” The only rain came from the fire hoses sucking water from the Seine. I arrived at Monday’s Healing Service and Eucharist with a heavy heart. Notre Dame is special to so many and serves as an abiding reminder of the faith of thousands. We remembered the Cathedral, the firefighters, Paris, and all of France in our prayers that evening.

The next day, pictures of the interior began flooding social media. The cross – it was gleaming. The fire hadn’t destroyed it. There it was, in the center of the photograph, surrounded by debris, with light streaming in from the absent ceiling. Was there ever a more perfect metaphor for Easter Day? Light from the ashes. Neither death nor destruction are the end. The Cross is empty. The Tomb is empty. Christ is risen indeed.

The message of the Cross – the message of the Resurrection – remains unchanged no matter where you find yourself though the ages:

God knows you. God loves you.

You are forgiven.

Christ is with you always. Alleluia.