

The Crucified Other

The Romans killed Jesus because he posed a threat to their violent empire. In their eyes, he was foreign, alien, other. Like all empires, political or religious, *the other* is a threat to cultures of control and entitlement. In our day, there are many *others*, who are violated daily because of disability, race, gender, or sexuality. They know the reality of crucifixion. In that sense, they have a first-hand insight into the passion of the Cross of Jesus. His death is their death.

Of course, there is a sense in which we are all marginalized. So, his death is our death too. But it is also the beginning of hope, because the violence and abuse of the world has been exposed, named, and refuted, all in an act of love. In other words, the Cross is not about appeasing a wrathful God, but God's generous gift of love to us, through the incarnation. Nonetheless, the Roman world could not cope with the gift of pure love. Alas, the world operates on a different economy (cf. Matt 20:1-16). But who are the others?

On the surface, the other is the stranger, who is bound to institutionalized prejudice. At a deeper level, others are different and fear drives us to punish those who are different. As Julia Kristeva expressed, "The phobic has no other object than the abject". Ironically, we need the other to grow. The other is the catalyst that elicits our full development, making us fully human, as Simone De Beauvoir wryly observed "Only the freedom of others keeps each one of us from hardening in the absurdity of facticity".

The other figures prominently in our tradition. In Paul's letter, for example, the barbarian Galatians embody the other that Christ sets free (Gal 5:1, 13). Moreover, otherness is constitutive of the character of Christianity, which is evident in the Passion narrative (cf. Matt 25:31-46). As such, the crucifixion is a disruption of the greatest order (Mk 15: 33). Accordingly, the old order is subverted (Mk 15:38). In this light, the empty tomb is a theologically significant space. For Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, it prefigures hope for the other, after all, "The tomb is empty!"

The significance of the other is reflected in church gossip. Of course, there is a negative form of gossip that is abusive, but there is also a positive form. In an ancient context, there was positive gossip about Jesus, "What is this? A new teaching – with authority" (Mk 1:27). However, there was also negative gossip rightly accusing him of being "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt 11:19 cf. 9:11). Above all, the teaching of Jesus is focused on the other.

So, the connection between the reign of God and the other is apparent in the symbol of the banquet. This can be seen at several levels. First, though it caused offense, Jesus chose to eat with the unclean (*les arnormaux*), drastically changing the seating arrangements. Second, the banquet shows the reign of God as countercultural because of its inclusive nature, for the banquet is for the blind, the lame, the poor, women, and children. It is for those who bear life's stigma. Ironically, the stigmatized, and not the disciples, see the true worth of Jesus.

In the Church, there is always a danger of tolerance veiled as acceptance. However, tolerance is a sign that we are still operating like an empire. On the surface, tolerance appears to be a form of inclusion, but beneath the surface, it is a form of exclusion. It is as if to say: *you are accepted up to this point, but no further*. Moreover, tolerance is invariably instituted as a means of avoiding the hard work of love.

Tolerance is usually a face-saving exercise for the sake of a controlling group, implemented to suppress public disapproval (*look how compassionate we are*). In fact, tolerance means we do not take the other seriously. This is not the fruit of the Cross. From the perspective of the Crucified, there is no holding back. There are no half measures. The other, the stranger, the alien, are all welcomed without qualification.

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