Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Why Do Catholics “Keep Christ on the Cross”?

Does the BIBLE Really Say That? By Patrick Madrid

Many non-Catholics have an aversion to crucifixes.  While they have no problem with an “empty cross”, some object to the crucifix because it depicts Christ dying on the cross.  “Christ isn’t on the cross anymore”, they say.  “He’s reigning gloriously in heaven.  So why emphasize his death?”  This is a reasonable question, and it deserves a reasonable answer.

Let’s start by recognizing that Catholics emphasize both the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, not minimizing or downplaying the importance of either.  In our manger scenes, stained glass windows and statues, we also depict the Lord as a baby in the manger, as a toddler in his mother’s arms and as a young man teaching the rabbis in the temple. Each of these stages of the Lord’s life is worthy of depiction.  But the focal point and purpose of Christ’s Incarnation and ministry is his death on the cross.  As he himself said, “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37).

Christ’s supreme act was to die on the cross as atonement for our sins.  His Resurrection was proof that what he did on the cross worked – he conquered death – and it demonstrated beyond any doubt that he was who he claimed to be:  God.  The Crucifixion was the act that changed history.  The Resurrection demonstrated the efficacy of that act.

By his death on the cross, Christ conquered sin and death, redeemed the world, opened the way of salvation for all who would receive it and reconciled his people with the Father.  That is why the crucifix is such a potent reminder for us of what he did on our behalf that dark afternoon Calvary.

In prayer with you during this Lenten season, this reflection was written by Patti Stirnaman

## Wednesday, March 10, 2021

The Bible

So much of our Catholic faith and tradition can be found in scripture. The words and stories when studied become part of who we are. While scripture was written years ago it still applies to our lives today and will for generations to come. As Catholics we are challenged to read, study and live the bible and our faith to our families, community and world.

Ascension has provided two resources which I have found helpful in studying scripture. I hope that they are helpful to you as well:

Why Study the Bible? Blog: [**Why Study the Bible? - Ascension Press Media**](https://media.ascensionpress.com/2021/03/08/why-study-the-bible/?utm_campaign=GPS%20-%20Email%209%20-%20Why%20Read%20Scripture%20article%20%28YbCV96%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Klaviyo&_ke=eyJrbF9jb21wYW55X2lkIjogIlRjcFpoSCIsICJrbF9lbWFpbCI6ICJjYnVya2FydEBzc3BwY2Mub3JnIn0%3D)

The Bible in a Year Podcast: [**The Bible in a Year Archives - Ascension Press Media**](https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/bibleinayear/)

Do you have a favorite scripture passage? When is the last time you prayed with scripture?

## Thursday, March 11, 2021

**Debunking myths that Easter and Christmas are derived from pagan holidays**

Have you ever wondered why the date of Easter changes every year? Or how the church established that date? What about the date for Christmas? We have all heard that our most beloved Christian holy days are link to pagan holidays. But is that really true?

In the early church, there were debates about the best date to celebrate Easter. Some wanted to continue to associate it with the Jewish Passover around late March or early April. But that date could fall on any day, and the Council of Nicaea, in 325 A.D., declared that Easter must be celebrated on Sunday, the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox, or March 21st. So, the earliest possible date of Easter is March 22nd and the latest is April 25th.

You often hear that Easter is associated with a pagan holiday. These claims are often made by those who want to undermine Christianity. They may argument that rabbits, eggs, and other symbols associated with Easter are fertility symbols, or that the name "Easter" itself is derived from the Mesopotamian goddess "Ishtar," or from an Anglo-Saxon goddess named "Eostre." There has been a longtime connection of hares and rabbits with death and rebirth, or in the Christian sense, resurrection.

In the ancient world, rabbits were said to serve various gods of love, life, death, and immortality. Given this association and the arrival of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, hares and rabbits became symbols of fertility in pre-Christian Europe. Various symbols for fertility, e.g., eggs and rabbits, that were already a part of the culture, became firmly attached to the Christian holiday known as Easter.

What about Christmas? Tertullian wrote that Christ suffered under Tiberius Caesar in March around Passover, on the eighth day before the first day of April, or March 25th. The importance of Christ’s death in correlation to his birth is revealed by another ancient tradition: that Christ was conceived and crucified on the same calendar day. It was a common belief that the Messiah fulfilled his mission on the anniversary of its inception.

St. Augustine attested to this and wrote that Jesus is believed to have been conceived on March 25th, the same date he suffered. This is also the Solemnity of the Annunciation, and nine months later is December 25th, the traditional date for Jesus’s birth. Additionally, pagans observed the birth of their deity, the Roman sun god, when the “great light” was at its lowest point of the year. This date was determined to be December 25, which was based on the Roman calculation of the winter solstice. But Christ is also prophesied as the “sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), who came in great lowliness.

There are other myths and legends associated with Christian holy days of Easter and Christmas. While both days remain subjects of debate, it is by no means essential to the mysteries themselves. The focal point is not so much when they occurred but that they occurred. At Christmas, we recognize that God, out of his love for humanity, sent his only begotten Son to redeem us. Easter is the fulfillment of that promise, that Jesus redeemed us from our sins and destroyed death through his glorious resurrection.

Have a prayerful lent as we await a joyous Easter. Submitted by Donna Lance

## Friday, March 12, 2021

**Stations of the Cross**

The Stations of the Cross are one of many ways we as Catholics can pray and deepen our relationship with Christ. As Catholics any time we can stop and reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we choose to say YES to our faith and share the tradition with other Christians. Ss. Peter and Paul offers the stations of the Cross every Friday evening in church beginning 6:30.

## Bishop Michael McGovern, offers a short reflection on the 14 Stations of the Cross****.****<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNjI1sxEHOA>

## Saturday, March 13, 2021

**Love & Light**

This weekend we celebrate the fourth Sunday of Lent, also known as Laetare Sunday.  We are half- way through Lent. The vestments worn will be rose colored, and we will hear a recognizable reading from John 3:14-21. This familiar scripture passage sums up for Christians, God’s unconditional love for each of us. A love so great that God gave his only son. It is important to note the theme of LIGHT. At our baptism our parents and godparents are presented with a candle. They are entrusted to keep its flame burning; this candle serves as a reminder to walk always as a child of light, sharing your light and faith with those around you. The light of Christ fills the hearts of those who choose to tell the truth, and choose right from wrong, those who build up the kingdom of God and live their faith.  How have you been a source of light to others? How can you stay close to the light of Jesus?

## Sunday, March 14, 2021

Exorcisms During Mass?

Now that we have your full attention, yes, as a matter of fact, the church all over the world offers prayers of exorcism on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent for those who will be baptized at Easter Vigil. What?! Exorcisms? During Mass? How did we miss this?

Well, these are not exorcisms like you may have seen in the movies. Our catechumen (those who are preparing for baptism) are not possessed by the devil. There are no demons being cast out and the priest or deacon does not address any evil spirits. Rather, these minor forms of exorcism are included in what the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) calls the “scrutinies.” They are part of the purification and enlightenment period of the catechumen’s preparation for the grace of baptism soon-to-come. The prayers of exorcism are beautiful prayers. The priest or deacon asks the catechumen to turn to the Lord and silently acknowledge their sins. He asks our Lord to free them from the power of sin and give them peace and protection. He then lays hands on each of them.

Next Lent, when we hopefully have adults to be baptized, listen closely to these prayers Father Linus or Father Evaristus or Deacon Tom prays over the catechumen on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. These are powerful moments of prayer for those preparing for Baptism. And they are beautiful opportunities for each one of us, the church who welcomes them, to join in praying that they be filled with God’s peace and protection during these final days before their baptism.

Submitted by Karen Seaborn

## Monday, March 15, 2021

Guardian Angels

Have you prayed the Guardian Angel Prayer lately?  Have you even thought about your guardian angel in recent years?  God has assigned to each one of us a guardian angel at our conception to watch over and help guide us in our time here on Earth.  The Bible does speak of these angels in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 18 verse 10, See that you do not despise one of these little ones for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven.  Those words were spoken by Jesus and are another example of the Father’s love for each of us.  The Church even has a feast day for the guardian angels, October 2.

Our guardian angels have God’s attention, and he listens to them according to Jesus.  There are nine choirs of angels, and all have different roles in Heaven.  Some are messengers, some serve God at His throne, and others carry out tasks for the Father.  Your guardian angel wants to offer assistance to you. God gave them a job to do, so don’t deny them that service.  Our guardian angels can be a source of strength for us in a challenge if we remember to call on them.

So, the next time you are getting ready for a test in school, job interview, or any tough conversation with someone, take a minute and say a quick prayer for the intercession of your guardian angel.  I have found that this has been a source of comfort and helped in the outcome of some of the tough situations in my life.  After all, their mission handed down by the creator of the universe is getting you through this world and into Heaven.  You are loved that much by our Father in Heaven!

Submitted by Nathan Higgerson

## Tuesday, March 16, 2021

**OUR LADY, UNDOER OF THE KNOTS**

Pope Francis has a special devotion to Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. While studying in Germany in the 1980s, he discovered this devotion at the Church of St. Peter am Perlach in Augsburg. In the church, there is a painting from about 1700 that depicts Mary in heaven surrounded by angels. She stands on the crescent moon crushing the head of the serpent, Satan. She holds a long ribbon and is untying a large knot, one of several on the ribbon.

But what are these knots?

There are the problems and struggles we face for which we do not see any solution … knots of discord in your family, lack of understanding between parents and children, disrespect, violence, the knots of deep hurts between husband and wife, the absence of peace and joy at home. There are also the knots of anguish and despair of separated couples, the dissolution of the family, the knots of a drug addict son or daughter, sick or separated from home or God, knots of alcoholism, the practice of abortion, depression, unemployment, fear, solitude…Ah, the knots of our life! How they suffocate the soul, beat us down and betray the heart’s joy and separate us from God.

**Pope Francis’ Prayer to Mary,  Undoer of Knots**

Holy Mary, full of God’s presence during the day of your life, you accepted with full humility the Father’s will, and the devil was never capable of tying you up with his confusion.

Once with your Son you interceded for our difficulties, and full of kindness and patience, you gave us example of how to untie the knots in our life. By remaining forever Our Mother, you put in order and make more clear the ties that link us to the Lord.

Holy Mother, Mother of God and our Mother, to you who untie with a motherly heart the knots of our life, we pray to you to receive in your hands (the name of the person), and to free him/her of the knots and confusion with which our enemy attacks.

Through your grace, your intercession and your example deliver us from all evil, Our Lady, and untie the knots that prevent us from being united with God, so that we, free from sin and error, may find Him in all things, may have our hearts placed in Him, and may serve Him always in our brothers and sisters. Amen.

This beautiful prayer, similar to the “Memorare,” moves us to invoke the compassion of our Blessed Mother. In her maternal care for each of us, she wants us to remain close to her Son, Jesus.   Never would she want the burdens of life to cause us to lose hope or despair.

To see a photo of the painting of Mary, Undoer of Knots and to read more about this story, go to: [**https://www.churchpop.com/2018/09/28/nothing-is-impossible-gods-mercy-remarkable-story-behind-mary-undoer-of-knots/**](https://www.churchpop.com/2018/09/28/nothing-is-impossible-gods-mercy-remarkable-story-behind-mary-undoer-of-knots/)

With you in prayer during this Lenten season, this reflection is submitted by Joyce Springer

## Wednesday, March 17, 2021

St. Patrick and Shamrocks

Christ Be With Me. Christ Witnin Me.

Christ Behind Me. Christ Before Me.

Christ in…Friend and Stranger.

Today we join millions around the world as we celebrate St. Patrick St. Patrick brought the Catholic Faith to Ireland. He was a priest, bishop and missionary. He is the Patron Saint of Engineers, Ireland and Nigeria. One interesting fact about St. Patrick is that he used the Shamrock to teach those he ministered to the trinity.

Below are short videos that share more about St. Patrick:

Want to learn more about St. Patrick: [**https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-patrick**](https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-patrick)

The Christian Symbolism of the Shamrock: [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpDydJMPba0**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpDydJMPba0)

Looking for fun ways to teach your child(ren) about St. Patrick, visit Catholic Icing**:** [**https://www.catholicicing.com/catholic-saint-patrick-crafts/**](https://www.catholicicing.com/catholic-saint-patrick-crafts/)

Happy St. Patrick’s Day.

## Thursday, March 18, 2021

Feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who was a bishop and Doctor of the Church.  He was born in the year 315.

Cyril was raised in the city of Jerusalem, was well-educated, and was ordained a priest by the Bishop of Jerusalem.  He later took the place of this Bishop when he was ordained a Bishop in the year 348.  Despite the Roman Empire legalizing Christianity, this gave rise to a number of internal controversies in the Church.

However, the man who consecrated Cyril as a bishop, was an ally of the Arians – who claimed that Jesus was a creature and not God. Cyril himself was unjustly suspected of heresy by many of his brother bishops.

In 381, Cyril participated in the Second Ecumenical Council, which condemned two different forms of Arianism and added statements about the Holy Spirit to the previous Nicene Creed.  This is the Creed that we use at Mass.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem died in 387, and was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1883.  Eventually, St. Cyril was remembered for his exhaustive Biblical knowledge, and his endurance in the face of misunderstanding and opposition.

Those who imagine that the lives of saints are simple and peace-filled are rudely shocked by Church history and stories of saints such as St. Cyril.  Saints often experienced the same difficulties as Jesus, who was misunderstood in His lifetime.  Good men and women in our church today suffer the pain of controversy and roadblocks as well.  It may slow them up for a while, but with the strength and belief in God, they will persevere and be the future saints of our church!   How do you respond when you are misunderstood?