



Message from the Bishop  
to the Clergy and People  
of the Diocese of Southeast Florida

The Feast of the Holy Cross  
14 September 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today we keep one of the great feasts of the Church, when we pay special devotion to the holy and life-giving cross. This day marks the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in the year 335, when the building that encloses the sites of Golgotha and the Tomb of Jesus, as well as the quarry where, by tradition, the remains of the cross were discovered by the Empress Helena, was consecrated for use. This great church remains in use to this day.

As we continue to assess damage and restore both our personal and corporate lives, this is a good feast for us to keep today, for the cross brings us to the heart of the mystery of suffering and of life.

For those of us who are enduring suffering during these days, as well as for those of us who are working to relieve the suffering of others, the cross reminds us that suffering in and of itself is a terrible thing. Suffering can be, and often is, demeaning, dehumanising, and destabilising. Suffering hurts, maims, and kills. Suffering is isolating and full of fear. We are surrounded by suffering all the time, though at some times, like the present, it is more evident.

Christians do not welcome suffering, and we do try to work so that the suffering of others can be relieved as much as possible. The spiritual challenge of suffering is immense, perhaps the hardest of the spiritual challenges in the Christian life. We know that suffering is a part of living, and each of us faces our suffering differently. The message of the cross is the challenge that we are not meant *to endure* suffering: endurance, while an important virtue, is not a specifically Christian virtue. The message of the cross is the challenge to us that we are called *to love through* the suffering we endure. This was Jesus' great message from the cross: in spite of all his terrible suffering, in spite of his feeling of abandonment, Jesus never stopped loving.

Whenever and however we suffer, we are called to love. Whenever and however we help those who suffer, we are called to love. This is the good news of the cross for us and for the world.

In our love in the face of suffering, I am particularly mindful today of our friends and family in the region of which we are a part and who are suffering hugely after Hurricane Irma. I have written to the Bishops of the Northeastern Caribbean, the Virgin Islands, the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands, Puerto Rico, the

Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Cuba to assure them of our prayers, solidarity, and help. Some of our island neighbours have endured almost the complete destruction of their communities and infrastructures.

I hope to have news from our neighbours soon, and we shall share this with you as we receive it. Please keep them in your prayers, as well as all those who are working now to bring aid and help to them.

As time goes on, we shall see more clearly the way forward. For now, we take one step at a time. There may be more problems from the storm ahead that are not evident to us right now, and the mantras "Please be safe," "Take no risks," and "People First" remain at the top of our list. Patience, understanding, and care for each other remain the order of the day. Tasks and work will be prioritized, and some things will have to wait.

Please keep your eye on the regular informational emails that Eduardo is sending out and posting on our Facebook page. There is new and helpful information every day.

Those who are working to support us remind us that this is a marathon, not a sprint. Care-givers must be cared for, and we must also care for ourselves. The demands will increase as things unfold, so it is important to keep well. The weather is very hot and humid in many places, and this makes extended outdoor work risky. And the emotional cost of this extended work will also have its effects. We shall all experience frustration, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness: let us not take this out on each other – or on anyone else, for that matter! The Christian virtues only count when they cost.

Kate and I continue to give thanks for you and to pray for you. Our clergy, staff, and lay leadership have been amazing throughout these days, and I am moved to be your bishop as we learn again the blessings of community.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you; because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

With every blessing,

+ *Peter*

### **The Collect for the Feast of the Holy Cross**

*Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.*