

## THE GREEN CROSS ~ A MEDITATION FOR LENT



**One of the four stained glass Rosary windows in the Church of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, Penzance.**

***This window illustrates the five Sorrowful Mysteries.***

## THE WAY OF THE CROSS

The window of the Sorrowful Mysteries has two green crosses. But the green cross is not a new idea.

In the Basilica of St Clement in Rome there is an early mosaic portraying the Cross as the Tree of life. From its base, leaves and stems cover the whole scene. *“The Cross of the Lord is become the tree of life for us.”* (Breviary)

Even people of no religious convictions have seen in the annual death and revival of trees and flowers a powerful symbol of growth. Politicians and economists often talk about “the green shoots of recovery.”

God the creator and Author of life, made our world good. In the Garden of Eden (Paradise) were two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Tree of Life is a symbol of immortality, and looks forward to Jesus, who said: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6) The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil tells us that we were created by God and must follow our Maker’s instructions. We are not free to do exactly what we want.

If we turn our back on God and say: “I’ll do it my way,” we fall into pride, the first of the Seven Deadly Sins. The story of the forbidden fruit is a vivid description of that first sin of the human race.

Pride puts **ME** at the centre of my own little world. It deceives us into thinking that we are in charge. But pride and the sins that derive from it, such as greed, envy and strife, upset the

order created by God. The brutal fact is that if I do it my way we shall pay a heavy price of suffering and sorrow.

The present pandemic has laid bare some of our underlying social sins, from domestic abuse to racism and child poverty. Many people down the ages have asked: why is there so much suffering in the world? Why do our best efforts to improve the world so often go wrong? Many answers have been put forward, some religious, some political.

But for us the cure for sin and evil must be the Cross of Christ. The grim depressing record of history must not make us despair.

In the Good Friday hymn of Bishop Venantius Fortunatus (530-609 AD) he writes *“God in pity saw man fallen, shamed and sunk in misery, when he fell on death by tasting fruit of the forbidden tree; then another tree was chosen, which the world from death should free.”*

That is the **Tree of life**, which more than 2000 years ago in Palestine was made into the cross used to bear the body of Christ, the Word made Flesh. On the cross, Christ overturned that original act of pride and rebellion.

Another Good Friday hymn, “Vexilla Regis” reminds us **“O Crux ave, spes unica.”** (*Hail, O Cross, our only hope*).

In Lent we can turn our lives around, and humbly return to God’s commandments.

Lent is a season of penance in which we own up to our failures in faith, hope and love, in which we turn from the temptation of the first tree to the Tree of Life and grow more like Christ, who

said in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*Father...let your will be done, not mine.*” (Luke 22:42)

***“Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.” (Eucharistic Acclamation)***

***Recommended reading:***

1) Genesis 1: 31                      *our world was made **good***  
                    2: 9, 15-17              *the two trees*  
                    3: 1-7                              *the first sin*

Proverbs 3: 18, 15: 4              *the tree of life*

Revelation 22: 2, 14 & 19 *also the tree of life*

John 6: 57, 14: 6                      *life in Jesus*

2) The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Paragraph 396 *Man is dependent on his Creator*  
                    397 *Man disobeyed God’s command*  
                    400 *Harmony is destroyed*  
                    408 & 418 *Original sin*  
                    412 *Why God did not stop us*

3) The Son’s Course (Fr. Gerald Vann O.P.)

Especially chapter 18: *The Two Trees*