

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“As I have loved you so you should love one another.”

Sometimes I get asked why in the Catholic tradition we use crucifixes where the body of Christ is depicted and in other Christian traditions only the cross is used or displayed. Simply put in the Catholic tradition we use both. Even on Good Friday for the veneration of the cross most often a simple cross is used without the figure of Christ on it. However, sometimes a larger crucifix is used instead and that is also permissible.

The reason we often depict the suffering Christ on the cross is as a reminder. The crucifix invites us to look at the figure nailed to the cross. See the pain and agony. Sense the depth of the love that is present in this act which has been freely chosen by the Son of God made man on our behalf. Let the crucifix remind you of the love that has been poured out on this world and on you and me in and through Jesus of Nazareth.

Why is that important? Go to the gospel for today’s Mass where Jesus speaks to his apostles at the end of his life, at the last meal that he will eat with them before he dies. He not only tells them to go forth and love people. He says something much more profound. Love one another as I have loved you. He sets the bar pretty high. He knows he will pour out his Spirit which is an empowering Spirit. He knows we cannot love without his grace in us. But he doesn’t just invite us to love others. He invites us to love others AS HE HAS LOVED US. I cannot do that unless I am constantly aware of how much I have been loved by Christ. And I won’t be aware of that love unless I pray and reflect and gaze upon his lifeless body. It is not nothing what he asks of us. But it is also not nothing what he believes we are capable of giving him. Love one another as I have love you. Can we do that? The question of the week.