5th Wednesday in Lent
West Henrietta, 1961
Rolling Meadows 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 27: 32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear His cross.

I, SIMON

My name is Simon. My home was in Cyrene, on the northern coast of Africa. Tradition has it that I was a Negro! Once the Bible refers to me as Niger - the black one. (The name was appropriate, for I was tanned dark by the hot sun of North Africa.) I was a very devout Jew; and while my home was more than a thousand miles from the city of Jerusalem and the temple, my family and I looked forward every year toward making the journey to the Holy City to celebrate one of the great festivals. Some of you would not walk very far to a service, but we thought enough of our God and of our Church to make the long trek from Cyrene to Jerusalem on camel-back and on foot.

as a young man I came into contact with the religion of Israel. Their beliefs & hopes impressed me greatly. I became one of them.

The year I met Christ - and so found my Savior - we had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the great Passover Festival. My wife and two sons and I made camp outside the city walls. There was less congestion there. With the many thousands of pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, there was hardly room to turn around in the city, let alone find a place to stay.

That Friday morning I was on my way into the city when, suddenly, I met a large procession of people coming out of the gate. I moved over to get a closer look. Three men were carrying crosses. Each was surrounded by four Roman soldiers. The soldier in front carried a wooden slate on which was written the nature of the crime the prisoner had committed. My curious glance fell on two of the condemned men. I could see at once that they were hard men who had lived their lives in defiance of the laws of God and men..... But the third man - He impressed me greatly. You could tell, just from looking at Him, that He was not like the other two. He was an utterly exhausted and thoroughly beaten man. Numerous little, caked streaks of blood marked His pale, ~~unshaven~~ cheeks. The hair around His head was matted with dry blood. The sight of the white, bloodsoaked robe covering His back was ghastly. His hands trembled as they clutched the cross. Later I learned what He had suffered: unspeakable agony in the garden; a sleepless night of mock trials, ridicule, torture, and a merciless flogging. He

staggered so badly with the cross that it was evident that He would by unable to carry it farther.

I looked around for His friends. It seemed strange that no one was ready to help Him. Was there no one to stand by Him in this hour of His greatest need? Was there none He had helped in life - none that felt a debt of gratitude - none to step forward with a helping hand?.... You there! You dark one! Carry this cross! -- the Roman soldier was pointing at me. There was nothing I could do. Objection would have been useless. Jesus crawled from under the cross with a look of relief and gratitude. Reluctantly I stooped and took His place. For that I shall be remembered as long as the Bible is read. My only regret is that all who hear my story will know that I was forced to carry the cross.

All of you know something about crosses. You understand how tears are made. Grief walks through the earth, you say, and sometimes sits at the feet of every man. The cross is like that. God has a great supply of crosses and one of them will fall, sooner or later, on every life. Some of you have crosses so small, you are scarcely aware of them; and the sun seems to be shining on all sides of your house. Some of you have crosses so large and heavy, you are wondering whether the sun will ever shine again.

Crosses can come into your life with shocking suddenness. Mine came that way. It was a beautiful spring morning. I was on my way to Jerusalem for worship. And then it came: You there! You dark one! Carry this cross! -- and suddenly I found myself going off in the opposite direction. I was going to celebrate. Instead, I struggled with a burden. I perspired and soiled my clean clothes. I carried that disgusting instrument of death, and so defiled myself ceremonially. Never forget, it can come to you like that. Life is quite pleasant and satisfying, and then it happens: You there! About-face! Carry this cross! Without warning the telephone rings, informing you that a loved one has been called out of this life. Or, you are driving home from work, making plans for an enjoyable evening. They never materialize. There is an accident and you spend uncomfortable days and

nights on a hospital bed. Or, you go to the doctor, confident that you will be well in a day or two, and his verdict falls like a bombshell. The cross changes lives.

But I had a great advantage over you. As I walked along the road that morning, I could see little of the cross and I had no one to talk to. Some of you look at almost nothing else in life but your cross, and you keep on talking about it. You treat your cross much like a child does an all-day-sucker. You put your cross on a convenient shelf and take it down every day or so and nibble at it just to keep going, and you offer some of it to everyone who comes near. You enjoy nothing quite so much as a recital of all your crosses, real or imaginary. If you had married more fortunately, if you had been educated better, if your parents had been more understanding, if you had not been ill, if bad luck were not forever dogging your steps, you would not be of all men most miserable. I say, I had an advantage over you in that there was no one to talk to about my cross! But you do not have to talk about yours either. God has given you of the 20th Century so many blessings in life. Why not talk about them for awhile?

What kind of cross you have is not important, but how you carry it is important. Do you remember what God once permitted in the life of Job? In one day he lost all of his possessions: 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 she asses, and a vast number of servants. That same day he learned that his 7 sons and 3 daughters had been killed. Then Job got deathly sick. Cankerous boils broke out all over his body. Poor Job was bent way over under the weight of his monstrous cross. But Job lifted his head long enough to confess, Though the Lord slay me, yet will I trust in Him. How do you carry your cross?

There is a difference between the ordinary crosses of life and the Christian cross. The soldiers pointed at me and said gruffly, You there! You dark one! Carry this cross! Christ Himself points at you and says, Take up your cross and follow Me. In fact, He makes the cross an indispensable condition of Christian discipleship: He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy

of Me. By cross Christ does not mean the inevitable afflictions that come upon all men. He means the sacrifice and the self-denial and everything you suffer because you are a Christian. How heavy is your Christian cross? What has it cost you in time and effort, in comfort and contributions, to be a Christian? What do you know about suffering for Christ's sake? Do you know what our Christian faith cost some of us in the early years of the Church's history? We gave up everything earthly, even our lives. We faced not merely the ridicule of a sophisticated world! We faced vicious enemies who burned us alive or had us torn to pieces by ravenous lions.

A writer of your day complains that you have made Christianity too easy. You never fast, you never abstain from anything, you never deny yourself anything, you never sacrifice in your giving, and you are never ridiculed for your faith because you live too much the way the world lives. If you are a true follower of Christ you will count no sacrifice too great, you will consider no suffering too severe, and you will look upon no hardship as being too difficult to endure for your Lord.

Believe me, when I tell you, the cross is your greatest blessing in life. It will turn to pure gold if you carry it right. The cross I carried that morning set my feet on a pthat the led me to the great, eternal treasure. It took me to Calvary and it was at Calvary that I learned to know, and believe in, the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. The wooden cross I carried for Him was insignificant compared with the load of sin He carried for the world, and for me. He carried it for you, too. He did not have to do it. He did it because He loved you as none other has ever loved you. Think of that sometime when your cross gets heavy!

One of the earliest Christian churches was established at Cyrene. Tradition gives me most of the credit. I had to tell others of the Savior I found on Calvary. I took my family to Calvary and they learned to believe in the Savior. My two sons, Alexander and Rufus, became pillars in the Church. When Paul sent

his letter to the Christians in Rome, he sent greetings to Rufus chosen in the Lord and his mother. That was my boy and wife. Because I carried the cross for Christ not only I, but my whole family became Christian. Thus that cross brought me eternal blessing.

The Arabs had a saying in my day which you of the 20th Century would do well to remember. The saying was this: All sunshine makes a desert. Learn that from me. Learn from me to thank God for every cross in your life that brings you nearer to the Savior. Blessed are they who willingly take their cross and follow Christ.

Amen.