

What does it take to lay down one's life for another?

Have you ever thought about the parallels between Christ's birth and his death?

At Christmas, many of us proudly display "Nativity Scenes" in our homes and front yards which feature the cast of characters who star in the story about the joy of Christ's birth.

Sometimes I wonder why our homes don't also have "Passion Scenes" to remind us of the events of His death.

In today's Gospel account about Jesus's suffering and death, there are many similarities to the story of His birth.

The wooden device that holds our Savior is not a manger but a cross.

The swaddling clothes have been replaced by the seamless white tunic.

Instead of the Star of Bethlehem to light up the night, there is only the darkness of Golgotha.

Cattle have been replaced by vultures ... both winged and human.

Instead of the shepherds and their sheep, we have the soldiers and their lances.

Gone are the Kings from the East with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. In their place stand poor and empty-handed peasants and the two thieves.

Mary is there again, but this time she is not the young girl of fifteen filled with the joy of a newborn child.

She is instead the forty-something mother witnessing the brutal and unimaginable death by torture of her son.

Her husband, Joseph, is gone, replaced by another Joseph, her son's secret friend, Joseph of Aramathea.

So why don't we proudly display this "Passion Scene" ...?

Maybe the answer lies in how we reacted when we heard the account of Jesus's death in Luke's Gospel.

Did you feel sad?

I did.

How did you feel when we shouted “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” ...?

Ashamed ...? Maybe even a little nauseated ...?

I did.

Hearing the story about anyone’s death is never easy for us.

Listening to the account of how someone was tortured to death is really difficult.

But we’ve gotten so used to hearing “Jesus was crucified” that it makes much less of an impact on us than it really should.

It’s pretty much impossible for us to fully understand the suffering of the innocent Jesus ... which he could very easily have avoided ... but He went through it anyway ... for us and because of our sins ... not His own.

How many of us would be willing to die for someone else?

Oh, sure, we might face off with someone who was threatening our families.

But for strangers ...?

Jesus did.

In today's Old Testament reading, Isaiah reminded us of one quality that is necessary if one is to sacrifice oneself for others.

He said, "I have set my face like flint."

But ... nowadays we want to be flexible about everything.

We want to build consensus ... and try to see the other person's point of view ... maybe giving a little here in exchange for receiving something there.

We don't want to appear as though we won't listen to different ideas ... but today we are reminded that there are values that are non-negotiable ... and realities for which we should be willing to die.

Maybe we won't be physically displaying that "Passion Scene" in our front yards this Spring, but we can keep those reminders of Christ's death in our hearts ... as we display that "face like flint" when it comes to our Catholic Christian values ...

... values such as the sacredness of life from conception to natural death ... and the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman.

And ... if push ever comes to shove ... we must be ready to die with Jesus if we are to also rise with Him in His resurrection.