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*The Modern Cross that Brings Us to our Knees*

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We live, my friends, in deceptive times. In the past, man strove for perfection, knowing it was unattainable in this reality. Guided by certain faith in a loving Creator, on whom he remained dependent, man reached for the stars, not expecting to touch them, but understanding that the act of reaching allowed him to become fully himself.

Today, mankind strives for omnipotence, believing this obtainable. Consequently, man feels overwhelmingly alone – that everything depends on his own efforts.

The delusion thus fostered afflicts us all. It invades our minds and changes how we think and feel. And sometimes we feel –in spite of ourselves – that we ought not to need God. Not, I stress, that we don't need Him, but that we OUGHT NOT to need Him.

Man has built his own world inside the mysterious one given to him by the One Who Makes Everything. And this internal manmade world has some strange, often contradictory characteristics. It makes us feel safer, yet less hopeful. It makes us feel more intelligent, yet closer to despairing. It thrusts omnipotence upon us, yet never have we felt more powerless.

This is the story of my life, a life lived within the false reality that man constructed to make himself secure.

As a child, I walked with Christ up the streets of my hometown. We talked as we went, about everything that was and everything that seemed possible. There was no need for 'belief'. I KNEW Christ, and there's no need to 'believe' in the things you know. He was with me always – my companion, my brother, my father, my protector ...

In my teens, I awoke to the manmade reality and its version of freedom, which was different to the freedom I had felt as a child. I intuited, somehow, that this new way of freedom seemed to exclude the possibility of walking onwards with Christ – that there was a choice to be made. Though I didn't wish for it, I sensed that, to go forward in the modern world, I would have to tear myself away from Him. And so I did – with sadness, with guilt, but also with many excuses and self-justifications.

So off I went on this great voyage of freedom.

For a while, it seemed obvious that I had made the right choice. I did indeed feel free. But, over time, I noticed that these new freedoms did not satisfy me. In some instances I found that these new freedoms were a cause of great hurt to me. And in one particular context – in my experience with alcohol – this supposed freedom brought me to my knees.

It brought me to my knees, but – fortunately – in more senses than one.

Perhaps it was necessary for me to have an extreme experience of freedom to alert me to the error I had made. Through the intercession of fellow casualties, fellow refugees from the same misunderstanding of freedom – who had already discovered something of the true nature of freedom – I was reintroduced to the idea that I was a created being. Though these new friendships, I was shown that I was dependent upon something far greater than anything I could find in the manmade world. From these friends, I learned that I was possessed of an infinite desire for this infinite Greatness.

Man is a walking question mark. You and I are edifices of desire. We are not made to settle for complacency and timidity and dullness. We are part of the Mystery which makes everything possible! This is why Jesus came among us: to show us what a human life can be.

These things I have learned from the friends I have met who helped me carry this so-modern cross of addiction and recovery. .

In time I learned that the desire for the Greatness of God was not some beautiful, abstract idea, but a fact central to my structure and nature. Going back to the beginning, I investigated myself and my place in the world. And I discovered that those innocent days, when I walked with Christ along the streets of my town – those were the moments in my life when my being was most profoundly in harmony with my true nature and structure.

This was an astonishing discovery.

In many ways it was a scandal.

But it was also a liberation. That I could again – after a painful journey – say the word ‘Christ’ as something true about myself. That I could approach again this patiently waiting figure – not out of

some sentimental or guilty wishing for reconciliation, but having learned that in this Person, this relationship, was the central truth about myself.

In those days, I learned that I was not made to be alone. Or, rather, that I was not made to imagine myself alone – for, no matter what we say, He is with us anyway.

I speak to you of my experience of reality. I speak facts, about things that happened, and continue to happen, and therefore of an empirical context. These facts are as true for my life as the fact that today is Saturday.

Let us ask, then, whether the manmade edifice, which we think of as reality, may be missing something that is real, factual or reasonable.

This manmade world and its ambitions are in many ways good. Inside it, we are safer and more comfortable than we might otherwise be. But the manmade world also hides from us the mysterious nature of reality, including the reality that remains inside us, defining us. This interior reality is fully accessible only through the encounter with this Person we call Christ.

Knowing Christ does not require us to turn our backs on curiosity, or progress, or enlightenment, or freedom. On the contrary, it requires us to look more deeply into reality, to see its true nature.

St John tells us that, anticipating the first Pentecost, Jesus said: ‘In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’.

I have come to see this as a literal description of my reality. I am not just this person who goes by the name of John. I am also Another – the one who makes me, with whom I exist in a relationship that I overlook at great risk to myself.

To know Christ is to know myself, to understand how I am made, and to become free in that knowledge – as I cannot become free in any other way.