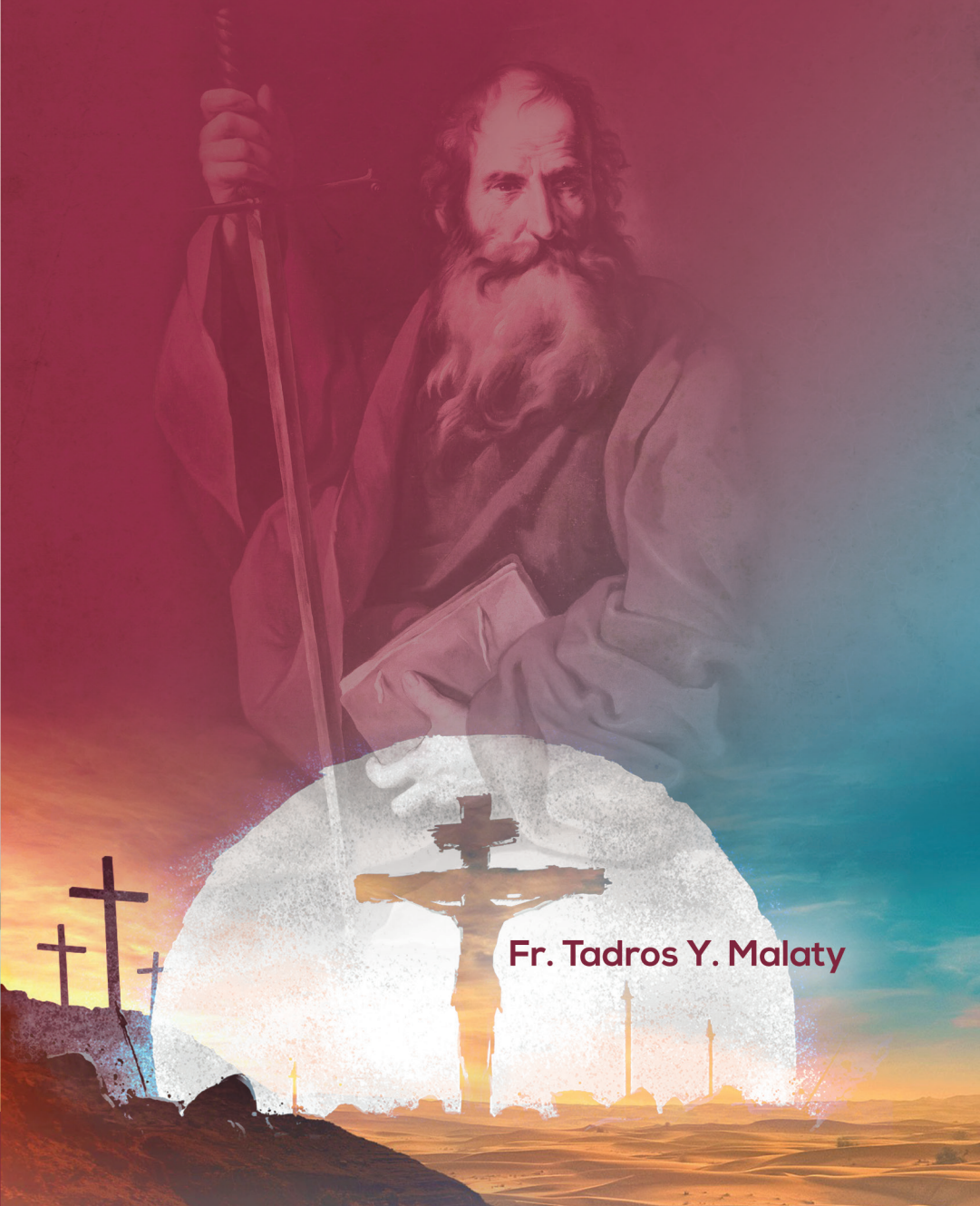


HOW DID SAUL OF TARSUS

acknowledge the power of the Cross?



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The Greatest Service to God and the People

Saul of Tarsus carried letters from the high priest to Damascus, to bring Christians bound to Jerusalem that they may face the penalty of death, because they are preaching the Crucified among criminals, as the Savior of the world. He was aided by a group of Roman soldiers to help in arresting those Christians and in bringing them for religious trial before the High-Priest and the Sanhedrin. (Acts 2-9:1)

How did this “hero” (in the eyes of the Jewish leaders) feel, as he was aiming to abolish the name of the Crucified Christ, in whom many believed to be the Messiah? In the eyes of the Gentiles, he was also considered a heroic figure, for they have witnessed some of their foolish fellows believe in this man who was Crucified, died, and buried and considered Him to be the Savior of the whole world.

For the Jews, the Cross was a stumbling block, as they were expecting a Messiah who rules over the world, and subjects the nations to the Jews. For the gentiles, the faith of those Christians was mere foolishness.

With all this in mind, Saul was moving strongly, considering himself a hero, for no one was brave enough like him to ask for letters from the High-Priest and for a Roman force to fulfill the greatest mission; getting rid of the name of Jesus and the exaltation of His Cross.

What was going on in Saul’s head? Was he picturing the hundreds of thousands of Christians chained and driven by the soldiers to Jerusalem? Was he imagining himself being welcomed by the High-Priest and the members of the Sanhedrin, praising his courage in doing this great service to God?

A Wonderous Vision

As Saul approached Damascus, he felt that the moment of execution has arrived which all the Jewish leaders and people were dreaming of, as well as the gentiles who were disturbed with this new Christian movement. Then, “suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.” (Acts 9:3)

It was something unexpected for him, unexpected for those surrounding him, and for all Jerusalem.

God did not appear to him to support him, as He did with Abraham, Moses, Elijah.

The Crucified Christ was sitting on His Divine throne, and a great light shone from the wounds of His resurrected body, which



ascended to heaven. Saul could not stare at the light shining from the nails' wounds in His hands and feet, the spear wound on His side, the marks of the thorns on His head and the stripes all over His body.

These are the glorious wounds of love. He might have seen the Heavenly powers still amazed by what the Incarnated, Crucified, Word of God has done, for they see in His Cross, the peak of glory and love, and not shame and disgrace.

Words of Reproach

He was surprised that the Crucified was reproaching him, but at the same time He was looking at him with eyes full of love and hope. Saul only heard the voice of the Lord saying: **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”** (Acts 5-9:4).

The eyes of the Crucified filled him with hope and power. Saul did not cry like Peter, when Christ looked at him (Matthew 26:75). On the contrary, he felt that this was the happiest moment of his life, the moment when he discovered the divine truth, and thus he asked, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

“Then, Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” (Acts 9-9:8)

His spiritual sight was opened and he realized that all things work together for good to those who love God.

I will dare to borrow the words of Saul himself, and offer a thanksgiving prayer for what happened to him.

[My Lord, O You who was Crucified, resurrected and sat on Your divine throne.

In my foolishness, I thought I was the hero, who can save the people of God from Your followers, but then I saw You; You who are the lover of mankind and Savior of all.

I was sharing with my fellow Jews their beliefs, mocking Your Cross, considering it a shame that is not up to the Messiah's status.

But now, allow me to testify from my depths, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

Nothing in this world be of value in my mind now. I do not mind if the whole world rises against me, for I will hide behind the wounds of the Crucified, and experience the power of His blood, which was shed for me.

You shone the light of the Cross upon me, so I fell on the ground and the gates of heaven were opened before me, this heaven which rejoices in Your salvation.

I thought I had the righteousness of the Law, even though, I felt the heaviness of this body of death.]

But now, I have seen You in the flesh, O You who was incarnate to raise me and sanctify my body with all its members, senses and feelings, as well as my soul and my will.

Through the Cross, You reconciled the two (my soul and my body) into one, thereby putting to death the enmity (Ephesians 2:6), and you reconciled the people (Jews) with the peoples (Gentiles).

From time to time, I used to regret that I am a descendant of Adam, the lawbreaker, but now I belong to You, the second Adam, who tore the handwriting of my sins, nailing it to the Cross. (Colossians 2:14)

I used to feel the bitterness of seeing my fellow Jews and gentiles following You, and You are the weak figure who fell under the Cross. I was echoing those who cried against You, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." (Matthew 27:42)

You are the Almighty, who was crucified in weakness, that we shall be made alive through the power of Your Cross. (2 Corinthians 13:4)

Thank You Lord, O You who by Your Cross have crucified my old man, that the body of sin might be done away with, that I should no longer be a slave of sin (Romans 6:6). My Creator, You granted me a new life according to Your image and Your likeness.

How can I ever repay Your blessings, O You whom by Your Cross, "[have] disarmed principalities and powers, you made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." (Colossians 2:15)

Paul the apostle asked you in fear and confusion, when he was taken by the glory of Your Cross,

"Lord, what do You want me to do?"

He felt his weakness, as he longed for the whole world to experience what he experienced on his way to Damascus.

The Feast of the Holy Cross (2020)

