

**IL CROCIFISSO LIGNEO
DELLA BASILICA VATICANA**

***THE WOODEN CRUCIFIX
OF SAINT PETER'S BASILICA***



PREFACE

The Gospels contain a striking detail that deserves close inspection. Three Evangelists (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are united in stating that before He died, Jesus cried out with all His might. That cry crossed the centuries, reaching our own time... to shake us, awaken us, call for our attention.

Why should we awaken and pay closer attention?

We should bear in mind that this shout was uttered from the heart and lips of Christ in the culminating moment of His life: the moment of which every detail reveals a glimpse of Heaven, which we must scrupulously take into consideration.

Here are the relevant Gospel texts. Let us begin with Matthew:

And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent. And the graves were opened: and many bodies of the saints that had slept arose (Matt. 27, 50-52).

Mark's account is as follows:

Jesus, having cried out with a loud voice, gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in two, from the top to the bottom. And the centurion who stood over against him, seeing that crying out in this manner he had given up the ghost, said: "Indeed this man was the son of God" (Mark 15: 38 > 37-39).

And finally, that of the Evangelist Luke:

And it was almost the sixth hour; and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And saying this, he gave up the ghost. Now the centurion, seeing what was done, glorified God, saying: "Indeed this was a just man" (Luke 23: 44-47).

John the Evangelist, who was the last of the Gospel writers, offers a further element that draws us into the mystery of God's cry, so we may understand the touching meaning of the reference to the dying Jesus.

John recounts the very last words spoken by Jesus, which – present as the young Evangelist was – he retained in his memory, conveying it to us:

Jesus said: "It is consummated!" And bowing his head, he gave up the ghost (John 19: 30).

What was consummated? What work had reached its ending? What plan had been accomplished?

It is once again John the Evangelist who offers us a key for understanding Jesus' last words. Indeed, he writes at the beginning of this account of the Passion that *"Before the festival day of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end"* (John 13: 1).



Here is the pearl of great price! Here is the key that opens the door to the mystery of God's great cry!

With His passion and death, Jesus brings to fruition a startling announcement that none of us could have ever imagined, or even dared to.

That announcement is as follows: the Omnipotence of God is an omnipotence of love, and solely an omnipotence of love. This piece of news tears the clouds asunder and gives us a glimpse of the very heart of God: God is love.

In this way, God only acts through love, because God is only capable of loving, and it is with infinite love that He challenges our capacity for malice, so as to redeem it.

And what of the cry? The great cry uttered by the Crucified Christ?

This is God's last call. A call to order that contains this resonant and touching message: *"Pay heed! God loves you enough to let Himself be nailed to the Cross! Pay heed: God cannot do more! If you refuse love, God has no other motives to convince you and change your hearts. If you do not hear this cry of His, there only remains the tragic silence of your refusal – with all its consequences on your shoulders!"*

Are we ready to listen to God's cry?

The ancient Crucifix of Saint Peter's Basilica, recently and admirably restored, affords us almost tangible contact with the final moment of Jesus' Passion: His face is calm, His gaze full of compassion, His mouth open, offering us the last word of love.

Looking at the Crucifix now displayed to the devotion of the faithful in the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, one can perceive that sweet rebuke: why do you not respond to my love?



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