

Take Up Your Cross: Reflection by Mr. Alan Lynch, Campus Minister

There is a statue of Jesus that you see all over Latin America. You see it everywhere. The size of the statue might be small enough to fit on a shelf in someone's home or it might be larger than life, in a church. It is a statue of Jesus carrying his cross. Generally he is dressed in a purple robe and his body is bent under the great weight of the cross. He is bloody and bruised and the crown of thorns is prominent and firmly set upon his head. It is a statue that is all about suffering. This Jesus is clearly struggling as he plods along the road to Calvary one painful step at a time. The people refer to this image of Jesus as *Jesus Tan Poderoso* (Jesus Most Powerful). Looking at the figure, however, you might wonder where's the power in this beaten and defeated man? But when you see the image enough and you study it a bit, you realize where the power lies. In this image, of the suffering Jesus, the eyes are always clear and fixed on something ahead. Jesus is gazing off into the distance as if he can see where he is going- as if he knows where this journey ends. And so, this image of Jesus on the way to Calvary is one of hope. Jesus is moving towards salvation- and it's clear that we are meant to go along.

Take up your cross- Jesus tells us! My Grandmother- a very pious woman- used this expression all the time with my brothers and sisters and I. If you were sad about something, if you hurt yourself- if you complained about some hard task ahead- she would remind us that we should pick up our cross and get on with it. For her, it was always about connecting your personal suffering to the suffering of Jesus. "If Jesus suffered so much for you," she would remind us, "you can certainly bear this small suffering in his name." I am sure that we rolled our eyes and thought, "right nana," and were convinced that she just didn't understand. She was right, of course, but taking up your cross isn't only about suffering. If we believe in the Gospel of Love that Jesus preaches then we know that following Jesus is about loving others- and sometimes that involves hardship or challenges. It's about offering support- a helping hand- a shoulder to cry on- a welcome and friendly smile. If we go out of our way to offer any of these to another, I think that we are following Jesus' path with our crosses firmly in place. And sometimes taking up your cross simply involves living the life you are here to live with all its joys and sorrow and doing so with a happy and grateful heart.

I met a man in Ecuador once. His name was Cristobal Colon. Spanish students will know that his name translates to Christopher Columbus- and ironically he led me to a new world. One day I took a wrong turn while visiting volunteer work sites on the outskirts of town. I had a young volunteer with me and right away he reminded me that I was going the wrong way. Instead of turning around, kept going - "I've never been down this way," I told him, "let's see what's down here." Within minutes, we were in hell. We found ourselves in the garbage dump- acres and acres of garbage with rats scurrying about, vultures circling, and clouds of flies. There was an acrid smoke in the air mingling with the smell of garbage. My first thought was to get out of there as fast as I could. I saw a man walking down the road, and I stopped, and asked him how to get back to the main road. Before he answered, he extended his hand and introduced himself. I asked him where I was and he told me and welcomed me to his community. That was Cristobal. I returned often in the next year and a half. I met a lot of people who lived on the dump, but I always visited with Cristobal and he always greeted me with that same open smile and a warm enthusiastic handshake.

Cristobal would be incredulous if he knew I was talking about him here today. He would say, "why me?" "I am nobody. I'm not important." But he is. He is a man who lives in garbage. He struggles everyday to have enough to feed himself and his family. His life is a challenge. But he lives each day with dignity, courage, faith and a sense of humor. He smiles at strangers and welcomes them to his neighborhood- he takes up his cross each day- and just lives the life that is his to live.