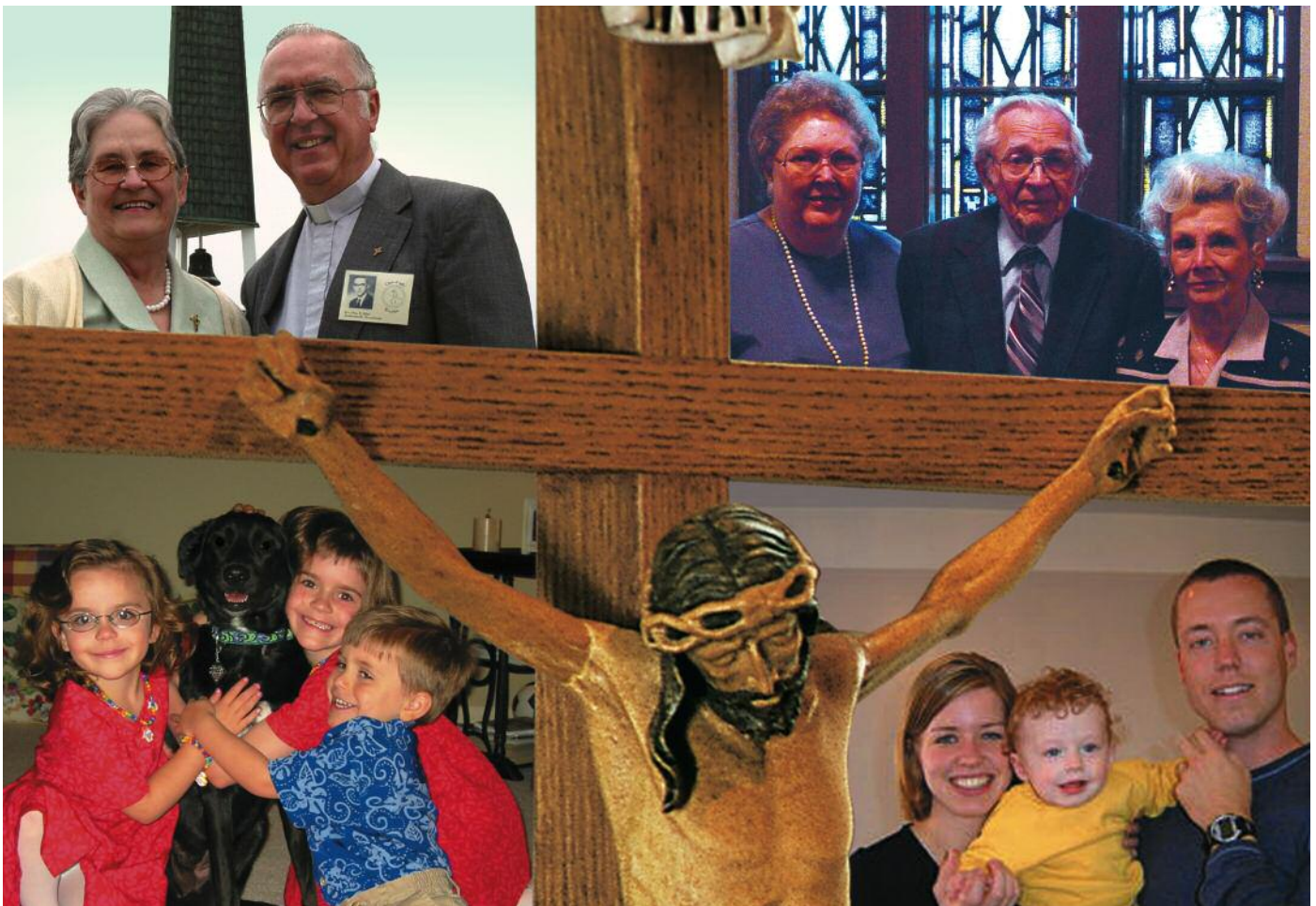


For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

July 2003. Volume Seven, Number Three



**The Cross  
and Personal Piety - p.4**

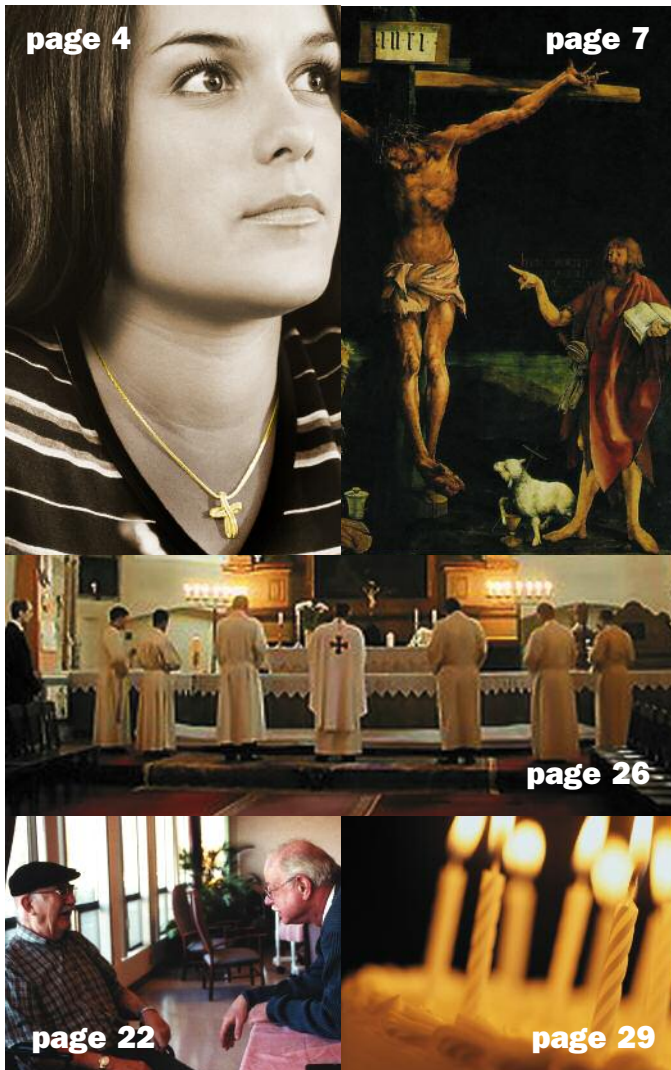
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## For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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## FEATURES

### 4 The Cross and Personal Piety

**By the Rev. Harold L. Senkbeil, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.**

“Be who you are.” Not being swayed by the godless influences of the world around us nor captivated by forms of piety that contradict the faith we confess, Lutheran Christians will want to publicly confess the faith as... well, Lutheran Christians.

### 7 Cross and Church

**By the Rev. Dr. Scott R. Murray, Pastor of Memorial Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas**

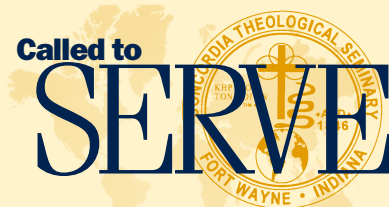
Christ’s cross always brings suffering (John 17:14). The Church patiently receives the suffering God sends. In faith the children of the Church receive from God only what He sends, but He sends the cross. We interpret suffering as evil and even the work of the devil. However, God Himself sends us the cross we bear and because He sends it, it must be for our good.

### 10 The Cross in the Christian Life

**By Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, Religion Editor of United Press International in Washington and a research scholar at the Institute on Religion and World Affairs, Boston University**

Cheap grace is an insidious, sneaky error menacing us every waking hour, especially in this postmodern era with its ever-shifting values and deities. The cross—our own and that of Christ—often seems veiled. We prefer to fast-forward to the resurrection, trying to bypass suffering as if we could undo the fall to which we owe our thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18).

### 13 What Does This Mean?



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# Cross and Church

By the Rev. Dr. Scott R. Murray



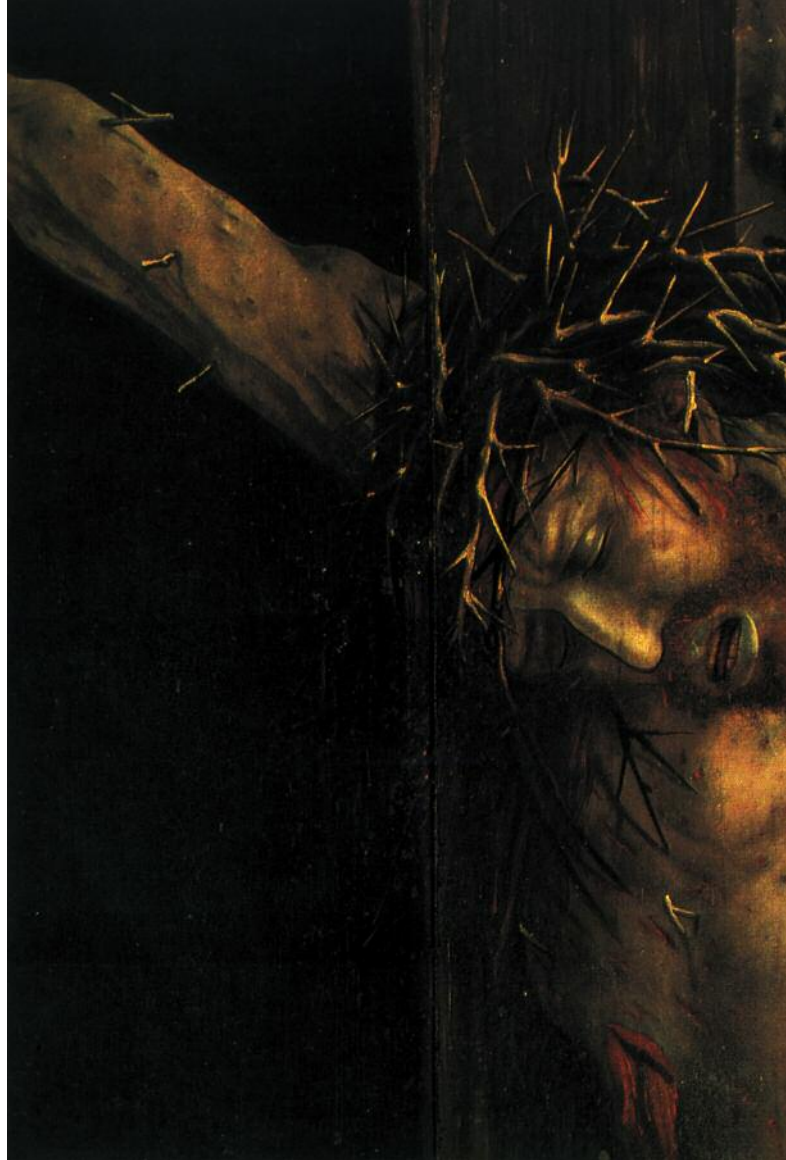
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**We interpret suffering as evil and even the work of the devil. However, God Himself sends us the cross we bear and because He sends it, it must be for our good. So as we look for the church by the signs that mark its presence among us, we must be aware that membership in Christ and His Church also brings the cross and with the cross its suffering and weakness.**

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One of our sister Lutheran congregations in Germany worships in a sanctuary called the *Kreuzkirche*. A huge crucifix, standing behind the altar, dominates the whole building. Christ on the cross stretching out his arms in death entirely embraces the worshippers. It is truly a “cross church.” The Lord’s cross must dominate the Church, for the cross shapes the entire life of God’s people by marking the presence of the Gospel. Cross and Church are inseparable.

Despite trendy revisions to traditional church architecture and art and new age attempts to hide the cross, the presence of the Church is still marked by a cross—on maps, on signs, and on steeples. Many churches are cross-shaped. The cross must dominate the Church because it is still the Lord’s sign. It must not



merely be an ornament but the bride's most treasured gift from her bridegroom, Christ. Martin Luther, in his "On the Councils and the Church," identifies the cross as one of the marks of the Church (*AE* 41:164-165). God has connected the means of grace, Word and Sacraments, to the cross, which arises out of these crystal-clear conveyors of God's grace.

The Church is cross-shaped in ways not open to mere human sight. Human reason scoffs at the Church's weakness and humility. The cross is itself a weak and humble sign. However, Christ mounted the tree and suffered death there precisely to be the glory of God and to bring that same glory to the Church. The glorified Lord explained to the Emmaus disciples, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26 NKJ). If the Savior must enter into glory through suffering, the Church should not expect anything else. Suffering becomes one of the marks of the divine treasures of God's grace.

The Church glories in the weakness of the cross, that the excellence of the Church may be God's alone (2 Cor. 4:7). The Church may not always be ablaze in visible glory, but often languishes under the cross with its attendant suffering. Human reason will never recognize this glory because under the shadow of the cross the Church's glory of sharing in the suffering of Christ is hidden.

In the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther put the word and cross together, "For where God's Word is preached, accepted or believed, and bears fruit, there the blessed holy cross will not be far away" (*Large Catechism* 3, 65-66). The Church comes into being with the cross impressed into the flesh of the bride. At Baptism the sign of the cross is set upon heart and forehead marking those redeemed by Christ the crucified. Baptism initiates into the Church by pressing the cross into the flesh of the baptized. Christ shares the cross and its death and suffering with those whom He draws down into the watery tomb of Baptism (Rom. 6:3).

At the altar of Memorial Lutheran Church in Houston, where I am the pastor, the wine in the communion chalice reflects the

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**According to the mysterious contraries of the Gospel, genuine joy only exists where the cross is borne in faith. Only faith can receive the contraries of suffering and joy in a single heart.**

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cross standing over the altar. When Christians drink the blood of Christ it brings the cross to the communicants. The Christian suffers the reception of the cross and all its blessings in the Sacrament. The Christian suffers in the hand of God by just "letting be." Patience means to suffer by permitting God to work His salvation in our lives. He works. We receive.

Christ's cross always brings suffering (John 17:14). The Church patiently receives the suffering God sends. In faith the children of the Church receive from God only what He sends, but He sends the cross. We interpret suffering as evil and even the work of the devil. However, God Himself sends us the cross we bear and because He sends it, it must be for our good. So as we look for the Church by the signs that mark its presence among us, we must be aware that membership in Christ and His Church also brings the cross and with the cross its suffering and weakness. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French apologist, identified the apparent contradiction implied by the cross and its suffering: "All those contradictions which seemed to take me furthest from the knowledge of any religion are what led



one when we, like Job, feel that God is our enemy. Such crosses are the lot of the Church and her children. The Word alone must overrule how we feel. The hymn by Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676), “When I Suffer Pains and Losses,” glories in high Christian confidence because God sends the cross.

Under burdens of cross-bearing, Though the weight May be great,  
Yet I’m not despairing.

You designed the cross you gave me; Thus you know All my woe  
And how best to save me. (*LW* 423, st. 2)

The Lord instructs with the cross and forces us to abandon ourselves to the mercy of our Lord Christ in the face of contrary evidence. Luther calls this the “Christian law.” “Suffering! suffering! Cross! cross! This and nothing else is the Christian law!” (*AE* 46: 29). Faith’s challenge is not to believe what we feel, but rather to believe what God has said. Luther warns, “For this is what happens: when a person wants to be a Christian and acts according to his feelings, he soon loses Christ,” (*AE* 51:203-204). The resounding Word of God overpowers the weakness and timidity of the heart, assuring us of God’s favor for Christ’s sake. To seek Christ in our easily deceived heart is to risk the loss of Christ and His cross.

me most directly to the true religion,” (*Pensees*, rev. ed., trans. A. J. Krailsheimer [NY: Penguin Books, 1995], 119). According to the mysterious contraries of the Gospel, genuine joy only exists where the cross is borne in faith. Only faith can receive the contraries of suffering and joy in a single heart.

The cross the Church bears is not merely earthly suffering, such as illness, death, unemployment, bad weather, etc., but it is the cost of facing the holy and righteous God who destroys our self-justifications and pretensions to our own righteousness. He takes our earthly props out from under us. When we think we have the future in our own hands and do not need God, He takes our health. When we think we have made it financially, He sends economic downturns. When we think our wisdom is sufficient for following Christ, He makes us fools. When we think we are going to cheat death and live forever, He sends cancer. The cross shows our need of God. King David, in contrition for his sin, says that the bones broken by God should rejoice (Ps. 51:8)! He kills only to make alive, but kill He does (Job 13:15). The most difficult cross to bear is the

**The cross means that we do not get our own way. We cannot. Our own way is the happy and broad road to damnation. For the Church’s only way is Christ Himself with His holy cross and suffering.**

God will despise our plans and set them ablaze just to show us the more glorious way through suffering: the way of facing the divine wrath, and so receiving only His mercy. We always pray this in the Lord’s prayer, “Thy will be done.” Luther sums this up so simply, “The cross alone is our theology,” (*WA* 5:176, 32). The cross means that we do not get our own way. We cannot. Our own way is the happy and broad road to damnation. For the Church’s only way is Christ Himself with His holy cross and suffering.

The cross “too is a holy possession whereby the Holy Spirit not only sanctifies His people, but also blesses them,” (*AE* 41:165). Where this cross is there is the Church. The Church must be a *Kreuzkirche*.

*The Rev. Dr. Scott R. Murray is Pastor of Memorial Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas.*