

THE GENUFLCTOR MAGAZINE

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“Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani”

EASTER | 2023

EI ELLAMA SABACHTHANI

Jesus before Jesus dies and commands his spirit into the hands of God, he cries out "Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani," which translates to "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is just three verses later in this gospel from Matthew that Jesus gives up his spirit. The last spoken words that are written down by Matthew are Jesus' plea. That is not an accident, nor is it without purpose. Just the placement of that phrase is a defining moment for our faith.

We should first discuss the context of Matthew's gospel. Matthew's gospel was written for the Jewish audience's of the time, due to this previous "career" being a Jewish tax collector. And it like this for all the gospels, that is they had a connection to their audiences. Therefore, that is the logical reason for Matthew including Jesus' allusion to the Psalms, "Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani."

But it is the placement of the phrase and the structure of Matthew's gospel that defines Jesus' paschal mystery. Matthew's last written words of Jesus are those of humanity -- he pleads with God and questions him as to why he must undergo the torture of the cross. As Catholics, we know that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine, and that despite being human when he entered the world, Jesus didn't give up his divinity, and remained the 2nd person of the trinity. But Matthew chose to highlight Jesus' humanity in the scene of Jesus' death. Why? Why not highlight his divinity?

It is because of Jesus' humanity that he takes up the burden of our sins. It is by his divinity that he breaks death, transcends time, and then saves us from the evil of death. But his humanity is needed -- Jesus needed to actually die for this to happen. If Jesus wasn't human, and therefore didn't truly die when he was crucified, he didn't defeat death and didn't save us. But, we know he was human, and therefore know the sacrifice he made for us. But, how do we know that Jesus was truly human?

We know that Jesus was human through these diction and syntax choices within the gospels. Matthew chose to include Jesus' biblical allusion, and further chose it to be Jesus' last written words because it shows Jesus true humanity, and the humility Jesus experienced on the cross.

Jesus was human, and he experienced pain just like us. We all experience pain in our lives, both emotional and physical. Some people experience much worse pain than others. But no matter who you are, where you came from, where you went to school, what you do for a living, or what religion you are, we have all felt some sort of pain. And unfortunately, there will always be pain as long as we are on this world. And although pain is an evil and God didn't intend for it to be in our lives, we are called to "deal with it," to put it in crude terms. We are called to "take up our cross," which will often include burdens we do not think we can handle. And it is during these times, we will often feel like God has forsaken us, that we have been truly abandoned by Christ, and we will question our faith. But there is NOTHING wrong with questioning our faith, or even respectfully calling out God.

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It is okay to call out God, question our faith, and truly feel abandoned when we experience our burdens. But we must know that Jesus trusted in his father, and took up his cross. We must remember that is because of this sacrifice by Jesus that we have been saved, saved from the evil of death.

God has never and will never abandon you, no matter what you feel.

God hears your SOS. God redeems you.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to welcome all of you to The Genuflecter Magazine. We are a Catholic magazine that issues monthly magazines that explore the scripture and themes of the liturgical season or celebration.

We were founded simply on the idea of spreading the faith to everyone, and making the knowledge and context of our faith more understood and available. We hope to grow over time to gain a larger audience of people.

We are non-profit magazine and simply exist to fulfill the 5th point of the kygrama of the Catholic faith, that is to spread such faith and the word of Jesus.

We ask you to join us on our spiritual journey as we seek to explore the faith founded by Jesus Christ.

Although we are a nonprofit magazine, we can only continue our ministry and magazine through the help of advertisements and donations. We appreciate your support!

IS EASTER EVEN RELEVANT?

I do not think it is a surprise to anyone reading this magazine that Christianity, including Catholicism, is on the rapid decline in the United States. And while our numbers get smaller and smaller, it is the atheists and agnostics that have become even bigger. Therefore, the ever decreasing number of Christians has left many questioning whether the sacred celebrations of the Church are even relevant to our modern society.

The sanctity and dignity of the human race doesn't have its source in humanity, nor is it some force of nature that dictates all humans have dignity. Our dignity comes from God — it comes from the fact that our earthly life is just our beginning. Our dignity comes from the undeniable fact that there is indeed an afterlife, an afterlife determined by our actions on this world.

Without the belief of an afterlife, one has nothing eternal to look forward to, nothing to "be on their best behavior for." Without an afterlife with God, our lives have no value. There is no reason to act well, or treat others with the respect and dignity they deserve.

But Easter is our reminder, our celebration that the afterlife does indeed exist and that it is because of this afterlife that we have dignity and that we are to live our lives in a certain way so that we can experience the goodness of such afterlife.

Jesus' resurrection, which is a fact of history, is the definitive evidence for an afterlife. Jesus literally rose from the again and it is because of this we know that eternal life exists with Jesus forever. Therefore, as Catholics, we respect the dignity and honor of human life because of the resurrection, because of the afterlife, and because of our calling with God.

It is important to note that our source in human dignity is not just the afterlife, which is definitively proven by Jesus with the resurrection. Our dignity comes from 1) being created in the image and likeness of God 2) being saved by Jesus on the cross 3) being called to spend the rest of our lives with God. Every single human being, no matter their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity are created, redeemed, and called by God. And it is because of these universal truths that we all share in equal human dignity, which can never be taken away from us, no matter who we are or what we have done.

To recap, Easter is more relevant in todays age frankly than other time in history, as we are dealing with an unprecedentedly low amount of religious people, who place little value on human life. But the resurrection shows that we are all CREATED, SAVED, and CALLED by God, and therefore, it is the Catholic belief to the resurrection that places such a high value on human dignity.

WHERE ARE WE AS A CHURCH?

I think this question is often posed around times of Christian celebration — where are we as a global church?

There are ups and there are downs. There are moments when the Church emerges as a strong force, others when it seems like it is ignored by the world, the media, and politicians. And it seems like this modern world favors the later, to ignore the Church and separate society from religion.

This is happening because the Church and Jesus' message is a threat to the corrupt world. This is the same reason why he was killed. He was a threat to corrupt and false authority, whether it be the Romans or the High Priests.

So where are we as a church? We are threatened but powerful. How are we powerful you may be asking? Because as the Church gets smaller, it will be among these people that it is spiritually the strongest.

Pope Benedict once gave a prophecy on the Church that said "From today's crisis, will emerge a Church that has lost a great deal... It will become small and will have to start pretty much all over again. It will no longer have use of the structures it built in its years of prosperity." This prophecy may sound dark and something that we don't want to hear, but it is the truth and we are seeing it play out in our modern world. Church attendance continues to decline and will continue to decline, and the Church will continue to be isolated by a society infected by what Saint John Paul II called a "culture of death."

So let me ask the question again. "Where are we as a church?" We are becoming more spiritually powerful everyday, and it is because of the resurrection that our resolve stays true. The Resurrection is the most powerful moment in our faith and it is where our faith meets its test — do you believe Jesus died and resurrected for us or not. And those that do believe will make up this Church that will be just as strong as the Church in 33 AD.