

Feminine Aspects of the Cross
Showy Evening Primrose
Mexican Primrose Pinkladies
Oenothera speciosa

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[A word about my writing style. I have a habit of unconventional capitalization which probably has its roots in my elementary study of the German language and flowered in my life as a educator/ preacher. The capitalization is my way to bring emphasis to the spoken word and for the reader of the text.]

The New Testament writers reflecting back on the events of Holy Week through the lens and teachings of the Resurrected Jesus and being being inspired by the Holy Spirit began to proclaim that through the Cross and Resurrection a wholeNew Creation had begun. Not only were human beings restored to a rightful relationship with their Creator, but all of the cosmos was redeemed and began the rapid movement towards God's loving completion through the love and action of the Cosmic Christ Jesus.

All of Creation, therefore, tales of the glory of God in Christ—all the mountains, oceans, trees, meadows, plants, creatures great and small and ecosystems. Of all of the wonders of nature there is one particular flower that helped me to ponder deeply the mysteries of the Cross and see it as a feminine symbol.

I was on retreat in Alabama having traveled from the winter weather of Wisconsin, when I encountered a common southern spring flower which I later learned is called the Showy Evening Primrose. It also has other names that I later learned included the Mexican Primrose and Pinkladies. (*Oenothera speciosa*),

On first discovery I picked one blossom to examine and immediately was overtaken by the unusual arrangement of the flower parts. As I looked several understandings and inspirations came to my mind almost all at once. I suppose it was because being on retreat my heart and spirit were particularly open and attuned that I received these teachings from nature. In retrospect this began my spiritual practice of what I call Nature Meditation.

The small common flower proudly shows forth the Cross as the most conspicuous part of the flower. The stigma is large and cross-shaped and protrudes up from the base of the flower to almost the lip of the cup formed by the flower petals. The Cross is not hidden deep inside the flower but it's out in front for all to see.

Any bee seeking the price of nectar or pollen has to pass through the arms of the Cross to reach the sweet goal. In this process pollen grains that the insect picked up earlier may get rubbed off and stuck to the Cross.

Once stuck the Cross gives nourishment and energy to the small pollen grain and it sprouts and begins to grow through the stigma carrying its genetic material to a waiting ova where fertilization takes place and a seed is produced.

The gift given to me was the realization the Cross is the means for new life. The Cross provides the nourishment and shows the path for growth for a person who chooses to follow the Way of Jesus. As in the case of this flower, the Cross reaches out embracing and ready to offer the opportunity

for growth and for entrance into the New Creation of Christ Jesus.

The Cross is not the END it is only the new beginning. The Cross is the life-giving force that enables one to grow through it into a new existence in the Cosmic Christ.

When fertilization is successful the flower dies, the Cross shrivels and disappears and is gone. The new life it enabled, however is taking form in a seed which will sprout when conditions are optimal. It will send down a root and then send up a stem with leaves and in due season a bud will form and then open to the sun once again to proclaim the life giving ability of the Cross. The Cross with open arms is ready to embrace and stretch out its arms to give of itself in order to make a new life possible.

It is THROUGH the Cross and not “by” the Cross that salvation, wholeness, transformation, amendment of life, reconciliation, metanoia takes place. The Cross means nothing as a beautiful church decoration or as a lovely piece of jewelry. It means little to hold it up and say, “I am saved by the Cross”. One has to enter into the Cross thereby permitting the Cross to nature them as the pollen grain is nurtured by the cross-stigma. Jesus, himself, was not only on the Cross for the nails drove his flesh and splintered bones into the Cross. His Sacred Blood soaked into the wood of the Cross.

The gift of the showy evening primrose caused a paradigm shift in my thinking about the Cross. The Cross has usually been understood in our culture as a masculine symbol. The masculinity that is expressed as an instrument of torture, empowerment, and death. The Cross was something that was used to enforce. The Cross turned sideways and grasped in the hand becomes a sword and a weapon. The cross-sword was and is still often used to force “conversion”.

Since that encounter with that small pink flower the Cross has taken on different symbolism for me. It has become a feminine symbol:

Embracing

Nurturing

Self-giving

Life-giving

Maybe that is the way that we should understand the Glory of the Cross rather than as a prod to eternal life.

The Christian life and ministry that follows this understanding of the Cross would be one that:

Embraces the world with all her diversity

Is Hopeful in face of difficulty

That is life-giving and always nourishes life

That stands ready to give but doesn't prod or force

Call forth the best in each person to live the passionate and compassionate life of Christ ready to give of oneself to bring forth New Life in others and then ready to fade away as their role is completed knowing that a New Creation and a New Christian is growing and will soon show forth their loving embracing, nurturing arms just as the seed gives way to the blossom.