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New Book by Ronald Rolheiser Explores the Most Revolutionary Moral Drama in History: Jesus's Passion, Death and Resurrection

The central mystery of the Christian faith embodied in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a revolutionary "love drama," according to Ronald Rolheiser, a Catholic priest and one of today's most influential spiritual writers. He offers profound insights into the meaning of this drama, including how we are meant to respond to it, in his new book *The Passion and the Cross* (Franciscan Media, \$12.99 paperback, October 30, 2015).

The secret of the moral drama played out in the death and resurrection of Jesus is that "in giving love away in total self-sacrifice, at the cost of humiliation, brokenness and death, we come to what's deepest and fullest in life," Rolheiser says. "This is an open secret, available to everybody and, paradoxically, more accessible to the 'little ones,' the poor, and more hidden to 'the wise and the clever.'"

Rolheiser asserts that the conventional understanding of passion as referring to the intensity of Christ's suffering is limiting. Rather, the passion's meaning expands when viewed as the time in the life and ministry of Jesus when "he ceases to be the doer and becomes the one who has things done to him." It's when Jesus enters "the darkest black hole of human existence: bitter misunderstanding, rejection, aloneness, loneliness, humiliation, and the helplessness to do anything about it."

There's a great lesson in this, Rolheiser says: "We, like Jesus, give as much to others in our passivities as in our activities. When we are no longer in charge, when we are beaten down by whatever, then we are undergoing our own passion and, like Jesus, have the opportunity to give our love and ourselves to others in a very deep way."

We're meant to imitate what Jesus did as he embraced the cross, Rolheiser says. It is a choice we face daily: "In the face of hatred, will we let go of love? That's the real and central drama of the Passion of the Christ."

The Passion and the Cross includes distinctive Rolheiser reflections such as:

- Moral Loneliness: "Our deepest loneliness is not sexual, but moral. We are feeling lonely in that precise place where we feel most strongly about the right and wrong of things. We long for moral affinity."
- Descent into Hell: "The doctrine of the descent into hell is singularly the most consoling of all doctrines in any religion. The love that Christ reveals in the cross is so strong that it can descend into any hell we can create, thaw out our frozen souls, and lead us into the light and peace of paradise, despite our fears and weaknesses. The cross of Christ does not stand helpless before a locked door."

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- Salvation: “Jesus took away the sin of the world by taking in hatred and giving back love.” Not, as is often implied, by somehow paying off a debt to God.
- Resurrection: “Resurrection is not just a question of one day after death rising from the dead, but it is also about daily rising from the many mini-graves within we so often find ourselves....we are called to respond to the Resurrection by becoming midwives of hope and trust. It is a needed vocation because all of us perpetually are in the agony of struggling to give birth to trust.”

“What the resurrection of Jesus reveals is that there’s a deep moral structure to the universe, that the contours of the universe are love and goodness and truth and that this structure, anchored at its center by Ultimate Love and Power, is non-negotiable,” Rolheiser says.

Ronald Rolheiser is a Roman Catholic priest and member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. One of the most popular and inclusive spiritual writers today, he is rooted in the Catholic faith, yet able to transcend denominational boundaries and religious language to appeal to both practicing Christians and unaffiliated seekers.

He is the author of twelve books, and a syndicated columnist carried in more than seventy newspapers worldwide. His previous book, *Sacred Fire: A Vision for Deeper Human and Christian Maturity* received the Association of Catholic Publishers’ “Excellence in Publishing Award” and was named its Book of the Year for 2015. A native of Saskatchewan, Canada, Rolheiser is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas.

The Passion and the Cross

by Ronald Rolheiser

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