

BEYOND THE SYMBOL

Mari Paz López Santos



In memory of a visit to a monastery I was given a ceramic reproduction of a Gothic rose window. While doing a photo of the cloister I slipped the package, but although it was well wrapped with bubble wrap, I heard a click announcing the disaster.

I waited to get home to see the result of such slip; the beautiful Gothic rose window had become a three-piece puzzle ... What a shame! I left it aside thinking to throw it away later on, which I did not. The following day in the presence of such symbol, my perception of the object had a sudden change.

That little gothic rosette spoke to me. It manifested as a word, a story, a symbol of a particular life: the monastic. With its three body pieces the symbol was sending me a message: "You have to pass through the symbols to get to the essence of what we mean, you have to enter the symbol to reach an understanding of its essence." Thank God it was not thrown away so I could "hear" such a wise message.

Yes, you have to "break" the symbols (figuratively, not as it happened to me), and dive into the reality of their meaning, without being trapped in its physical form, but seeing beyond.

The broken rosette warned me about the danger of remaining superficially attached to the symbol, worshiping and adoring it, unaware that it is an icon of a greater, deeper and more extensive reality not to be missed.

I took a piece of wood about eight inches, I painted it red English, stick the three pieces together with a gap of half centimeter, and I watched the effect. Then I painted in gold the "wound" that separated the three pieces so to hang it on the wall of my house. The red paint means human life; the golden, the glimpse of the transcendental.

So there it is on the wall, displaying its broken body, seemingly silent but active. Anytime I am asked why a broken rosette is on the wall, and I naturally say what it means to me, I think it becomes a living catechesis.

We live in a society with symbols all over, and explanatory logos inviting to purchase, indicating danger, forbidding, etc.. But after thinking about the torn rosette I decided to spend some time discussing the religious symbols.

All religions have symbolic language of what their own spirituality want to manifest, but there is a very common phenomenon (and very human, by the way): to be anchored in the symbol, *making a tent* (like Peter wanted in Tabor, Mk 9, 5) and with no progress on the path that leads to the real experience of what the symbol means.

For Christians, the cross is the great symbol. It draws us is into the deep mystery of salvation: God made Man and sacrificed by men themselves with weapons of injustice and sin of all time. It shows that we will find pain and death on the way, but they are not the end of the Road.

Contemplating the cross and going along the way with it, it is seen as a prelude to the resurrection.

Let's contemplate the symbol and dynamically dig into it with the conviction that the symbol is not what it stands for.

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