

How do you completely destroy somebody? I don't mean just beat up on somebody, maybe knock out a few teeth. I mean how do you **destroy** someone? How do you kill them, pulverize them, grind them into dust and trampled them under-foot. How do you accomplish this kind of complete annihilation of a being or group?

You can't do it politically. Oh, you can defeat a political opponent or party in an election. But history shows that the defeated party or candidate will almost always return to the campaign trail and win a future election. So politics don't suffice to really annihilate somebody.

You can't do it legally either. For decades in this country one race of people was immorally enslaved by unjust laws. But eventually, that people was able to throw off the shackles of slavery. No, laws – no matter how violently enforced – legal means are not enough to really destroy any person or people, if those people are determined to live and be free.



You can't even really destroy someone by simply killing them. In about 10 days, it will have been 48 years that, on the balcony of a second-floor room at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Martin Luther King, Jr. was struck in the neck by a single bullet. He died an hour later at St. Joseph's Hospital. But he was in no way destroyed. No one could rightfully say that The Rev. Dr. King was destroyed, since the power of his faith and conviction is so very vibrant in our country today.

So, if politics, or laws, or even murder isn't enough to really destroy somebody, how is it possible? How can you so completely do away with someone, that they become a mere footnote in the chronicles of history? The only way, it seems to me to accomplish this level of destruction – the only way to really destroy someone is by utter and complete humiliation.

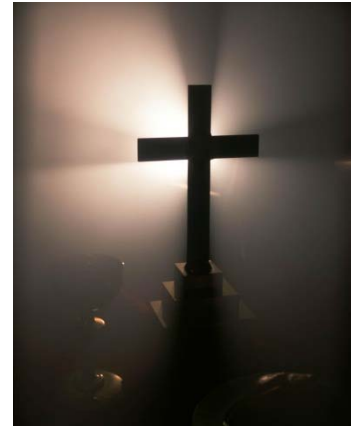
I am told that it is possible, for example, to change the very nature of an animal through chronic abuse. If a dog, one of God's creatures, if a dog is confined to a cage, and starved, and neglected for days and weeks and months, I am told that the animal will eventually lose the natural characteristics of a dog. It will become, through this kind of complete humiliation, something else, something less. Its nature will indeed be crushed.

Many years ago during a retreat, an elderly Catholic priest who had heard many a confession confided in me that the woman who is betrayed by her husband often becomes something worse than dead. Because the humiliation that results from that kind of betrayal often transforms the wife into a kind of empty husk, a withered and dried-out thing much worse than dead. Yes, that kind of shame, the degree of utter humiliation that comes from the betrayal of adultery is enough, it seems, to bring about utter destruction.

That's what I want you to understand about Palm Sunday. This is what I want you to understand about the Cross. In order to bring about the redemption of His Children, it wasn't enough for God to defeat evil, to knock its teeth out or lay it out cold. Redemption, complete redemption of mankind required more. God needed to utterly vanquish evil, to make it clear that evil could no way, no how, and never be victorious in the fight over salvation.

But how to accomplish this? How was it possible to so utterly pulverize the Evil One so that God could make His victory clear for all time? The way to accomplish this was... the Cross.

Because with the Cross, God turned Satan against himself. With the Cross of Jesus, God took everything Evil could throw at Him. God went out to meet the greatest military empire the world had ever known. And He allowed himself be abused, and whipped and beaten in the most shameful way imaginable. God let himself be tortured in a death of indescribable agony reserved only for the worst kind of criminal. And then...and then...after taking upon himself every abuse, every humiliation, every debasement that Evil could heap upon Him...God rose victorious. He proved that the power of Evil was as nothing compared to the awesome might of God's love for the world.



This, then, is the power of the Cross; that God took all the villainy of Evil and proved it worthless; that the Lord God turned the humiliation of Satan upon himself. The power of the Cross is that death has once and forever been utterly destroyed, and God has eternally established His sovereignty over all mankind. That is what this day and this Holy Week are all about. That finally, finally every knee shall bend, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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