

## The Hole at Holy Ground

Father Casimiro Roca of the Santuario de Chimayo in New Mexico doesn't believe in down 'n' dirty miracles. Though suffering pilgrims trek miles to purchase bags of his church's sanctified soil, Roca denies that the dust (which he openly admits to muling in from an outside source) does the trick. Credit for the healings, he insists, belongs to the cross.

He means a very specific cross—a six-foot crucifix above the main altar. This relic may or may not have divine powers. It undoubtedly has a great story.

On Good Friday in 1810 a group of penitents beheld a beacon of light that stabbed into the desert darkness. They followed it to find the crucifix half-sunk in the sand. A local priest organized a parade to truck the venerable object ten miles to the nearest church. The next morning it reappeared in the same spot in the wilderness. The third time this happened the congregation decided to leave the cross where it was and build a church around it.

Debate now rages as to which heals: the cross that came out of the hole, or the hole that held the cross. I have no opinion either way, but I like the theology reflected by the legend.

Hebrews 13.11-12 posits the polar opposites of holiness: sacred ground that receives holiness, and the unhallowed precincts that house the husks. The cross of Christ, the writer insists, reverses the process. Jesus died outside the gate. The temple sat within. The answer is not to cleanse the cross but to reject religion's architecture in favor of the suffering Savior. We do not build the church then usher the cross inside. We first find the cross then build the church around it. "Let us go to him," v.13 admonishes. Enough with polite invitations for Christ to join us on our padded pews. Let us scour the untamed deserts of sin and suffering to find the holes and hovels that hold the crucified God.

At the outset of Holy Week we find Jesus homing in on Calvary like a heat-seeking missile. His every action engineers the dark outcome of what faith alone can label Good Friday. He wants the cross so bad that he will walk whip-shredded and scorned clean out of the Sacred City in order to find it in a shallow posthole on Skull Hill.

The days that lead up to Easter invite the church to ask herself to what extent she joins this quest for the cross. Easter insists that we worship the risen Christ but Good Friday reminds us first to relocate church to the foot of the cross.

At Cross Purposes,  
Doug