



## FRIENDS OF THE PENAL CRUCIFIX

Penal Crosses or more correctly Crucifixes date in Ireland from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. They were a form of folk craft produced by local people as a resource for those making the pilgrimage to Lough Derg. Pilgrims purchased these small hand carved crucifixes to bring to Lough Derg as part of their experience of the pilgrimage. Gazing at the symbols of the passion as part of the stations on the island made these very precious reminders of the experience of the three days of fasting and prayer that all pilgrims embraced as part of their spiritual journey at St Patrick's Purgatory.

That these crosses were made at the time that Roman Catholicism was under threat and persecution in Ireland makes them all the more important as part of the story of faith and Christianity in Ireland. Pilgrims took home their own crosses with a deep sense of gratitude to God for the blessing of completing their own personal pilgrimage. They treasured their cross within their own immediate family circle often using the symbols of the passion displayed on

each cross as way to teach and appreciate the full story of what Jesus, God's Son had endured in His love for the world as he died upon the cross.

Authentic true Crucifixes dating from Penal times are indeed rare. Many are in museums. They number around 170 known examples. In some places families have passed on such crosses and they are often produced at wakes for the dead or even as devotional death crosses. Examples are found all over Ireland but especially in the North West in the locality of Lough Derg and along pilgrim routes in Tyrone, Armagh and Louth. One such example from Dundalk is now in the Philippines. Another known as the "Murray Cross" is held in the O'Fiaich Library Armagh. Recently copies have been produced using moulding peat dust and also there have been some castings in metal of facsimiles as commercial undertakings. In many cases tourist have taken these home as part of their visit to Ireland.

Friends of the Penal Crucifix is a group of like minded people who have undertaken to display and make known the story of the Penal Cross / Crucifix to people they meet, to family contacts and especially to use as a focus for prayer and spirituality once more. Those registered with the group will be kept aware of articles and news of how Penal Crosses are a special part of our faith story. They in turn undertake to share these with as many others as possible so that in a small way the special Christian focus of our heritage as Irish people may continue to flourish and be known and appreciated.

Friends of the Penal Crucifix is a project of the Armagh Prayer and Spirituality Commission. Materials for sharing will be available from the website [WWW.prayerandspirituality.com](http://WWW.prayerandspirituality.com) where a downloadable registration form will be available to people wishing to register or become a "Friend" .

Friends will also undertake to present such Crosses / Crucifixes to others in the hope of spreading the devotion once more. It would be lovely to have such crosses associated with the Lough Derg Pilgrimage once more in our own times.

## SYMBOLS OF THE PASSION & DEATH OF THE LORD:



**Inscription** - INRI is the Greek acronym IESVS · NAZARENVS · REX · IVDÆORVM, which translated into English is *Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews*.

**Crown of Thorns** - Representing the Crown of Thorns placed on Christ's head.

**Chalice / Cup** - Representing the Last Supper. This is an example where an image is symbolic of more than one thing. Just as the chalice is representative of the Last Supper, so it also represents the Eucharist where we share in the Resurrection through the body and blood of Christ today. (Breaking of Bread at Emmaus)

**Hammer** - Representing the tool used to nail Christ to the cross.

**Cords / Whip** - Representing the Christ's Scourging at the Pillar.

**Five Wounds** - Representing the wounds Christ endured on the cross-the nails in his hands and his feet & the sword that pierced His side

**Spear** - Representing the spear (sword) that the soldier used to pierce Jesus' side.

**Ladder** - Representing the ladder used to remove Jesus from the cross after His death.

**Bowl** - Representing the bowl (jug) of water used to wash Christ's feet on the Last Supper.

**Nails** - Representing 3 the nails (spikes) that were used on Christ's hands and feet.

**Rooster and Pot** - Representing the rooster (cock) that crowed 3 the times Peter denied Christ just as Christ foretold. Also representing the legend of the rooster that Judas's wife was cooking in a pot. According to a story, Judas came home and told his wife that he wanted to hang himself in fear that Christ would come for him because he had turned him over to the Roman soldiers. His wife told him that the possibility of

Jesus rising from the dead and coming to get him was as likely as the rooster in the pot coming back to life - which it then did !!



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