



It was just over a year ago now that things started to get all messed up by this coronavirus. One of the biggest events for the whole world that was forced to be postponed was the Games for the XXXII Olympiad, meant to be held in Tokyo last summer. As of now, the plan remains to hold the Olympics there in a few months, instead. However, five years ago, the last summer games took over Rio de Janeiro, and one of the encapsulating images for that port city of Brazil that was shown on television over and over again, was the Christ the Redeemer statue.

It stands on the summit on Mount Corcovado, as you can look out on the pristine Atlantic Ocean. Nevertheless, the concrete behemoth depicting Jesus Christ is 98 feet tall and with his arms spread out 92 feet in length. And yet, the hands are positioned in such a way as if Jesus is welcoming not just Rio de Janeiro or Brazil or all the people who make the pilgrimage up the over 2,000 foot ascent to the mountain's summit; but all the times it appeared on the screen during the last Olympics, it was as if our Lord was welcoming the whole world into the same loving embrace that has been wrapped around the entire universe since the beginning.

And so, as we draw our midweek Lenten journey to a close, after being reinforced with God's emphasis on being in community with the Creation, with all the saints, with our neighbor, with those on the margins, we end with the greatest comfort of all: that no matter what, we are all in community with Christ. Of course, Lent oftentimes gets narrowed down to certain behaviors we have attempted to perfect during these 40 days. There isn't anything wrong with trying to instill some healthy and spiritual disciplines so that we may better care for ourselves and others, but when it comes to being in community with our Lord and Savior, it is all about what Christ has done, is doing, and will do for eternity. This isn't about us perfecting our words and actions so that we may be one with Christ. Don't worry, the Savior, Christ the Redeemer, already took care of that.

As with every Lent, we journey toward a cross, a cross that was undeniably brutal and horrific for those who endured such pain and torture. And yet, on that cross, Jesus not only opened his arms for the nails, but he opened his arms to fully welcome us into a love that can never be taken away. It is the Gospel that is meant even for those of us who have our James and John moments, obsessed over spiritual hierarchy on this earthly level and beyond. It is meant for those who get angry over such people. It is even meant for those who played a role in causing the excruciating agony for a man who just wanted to bring heaven to earth. There are no limits to the transformational power of this cross. And it's no mistake that the Christ the Redeemer statue with Jesus' arms extended has his body eerily shaped to how he would have been on the Calvary cross; but those extended arms are meant to show that on that very Lent-encapsulating Good Friday, he wrapped us all around in a death-defying love and brought us into a community that we will never be taken away from now and forevermore. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.

*Image: Britannica.com (sfmthd/Fotolia)*