



## Alma 39.<sup>8-9</sup>— Meditation

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<sup>8</sup>But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day. <sup>9</sup>Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

As I contemplate the season of Lent and consider its requirement for an additional level of self-control, self-restraint, and self-denial, I can't help thinking of Jesus and the extraordinary self-control and restraint that he exercised throughout his life. It is evident from those very first moments when he resisted the desert temptation to use his power to alleviate his own hunger or gratify his pride to the moment when he refused to call upon legions of angels to stop his arrest to the moments when he refused to halt the suffering and pain of the cross. The cross is certainly a symbol of salvation and service to others. But it is also an incredible sign of self-restraint. How badly he must have wanted the pain to end. Yet, he did nothing to diminish, let alone end it.

Though it would happen generations later and half a world way, Alma knew of Jesus' excruciating death through crucifixion. While there is no evidence that Nephite society possessed a private ritual like that of the Catholic crossing of self,<sup>1</sup> it seems likely that Alma could have thought of the cross as a symbol of self-control and restraint. Maybe the self-sacrifice Jesus demonstrated on the cross was on Alma's mind when he admonished his son, Corianton, to "go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things" (Al 39.<sup>9</sup>). Maybe Alma wished to remind Corianton of Jesus' own self-restraint and encourage him to follow that divine example.

During Lent, it is wise and good to consider the level of our own self-restraint and self-control. We all know lust. The root of the Greek word translated as "lust" is *thyo*. It denotes "violent movement." Among its many uses, it can refer to boiling water. Lust is a desire that moves and brings to action. It is a longing and craving. One can hardly walk into a department store, grocery store, or browse through Amazon or Wayfair or a host of other on-line sites, without feeling lust begin to bubble up. Our materialistic society assaults us constantly. Advertisers seek to magnify our lust and move us to action so that we yield to their temptations to consume.

Thus, Alma's admonition to "cross yourself" is highly appropriate. Among its many meanings, to cross oneself denotes our need to "oppose," "contradict," "obstruct," "disrupt," and even "betray" the demanding lusts of our natural, fallen nature—a nature so empty that it lusts to fill the holes with

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<sup>1</sup> LDS culture and ritual, it is claimed, does not utilize the cross or focus on Jesus' death. Both claims are bogus. The only ritual in which we engage weekly is one that commemorates and reenacts Jesus' death. And, if one knows what to look for and what they are seeing, the LDS endowment is replete with the sign of the cross, often "crooked," in the signs and tokens of the priesthood.

anything, however inconsequential, transitory, and harmful. Yes, we must act in betrayal of our natural, lustful state and engage in the mortification of our flesh. We must fight our lustful nature to the death as Jesus did. Indeed, the fight is to death—either the death of the spirit or the death of the flesh.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*