You know, it’s Labor Day weekend, and I don’t feel like preaching a homily, so how about a story instead? Okay??

“Hey Grams”, said Paul, sticking his head through the back door into the kitchen. “Got anything to eat?”

“Don’t you ever knock?”, said his grandmother. “Come and sit down, they’ll be out in a minute.”

Paul smiled and sat down at the kitchen table. He was a graduate student at the University just down the road and always stopped by on Wednesday afternoon for some cookies. They were the best. But more than that, he just liked talking to his grandmother.

Sitting back in his chair he noticed a new cross on the wall above the door. “Gram, is that another cross? You’ve got so many already. You must have a hundred by now.”

His grandmother said, “It’s not a cross dear, it’s a crucifix, and that’s just number 41.”

“That one’s pretty cool … but, why do you collect them?”

“Well …” she said, taking the cookies out of the oven, “that’s a bit of story.” She sat down at the table and went on …

“They remind me not to be afraid.”

“Afraid?” said Paul. “Grandma, you are the most confident person I know!”

She smiled. “I wasn’t always. As a young woman I was insecure and timid. I worried about everything. But the worst time was after your grandpa and I got engaged and he was sent off to the war. I was terrified of losing him.
I made myself sick with worry. Then one Sunday at church the reading was from Matthew: ‘… deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me... ’.”

“I’m not sure why, but that line stuck with me all day and it added to my mood, which just got darker. I kept thinking, Jesus must have been afraid, even though he was surrounded by friends and his days were full. What a dark, dark cloud to have on your horizon.

That night, sitting on my bed wondering why I was so afraid of everything and Jesus seemed so calm and self assured, I kept asking myself, what’s the difference?”

Paul started to grin.

“So, dear, no smart remarks! I know he was God – but, he was also human and I was focused on his humanity.

And then it hit me: He had hope, Paul, and I had lost it, or forgotten it. All I could see was the dark. The darkness Jesus saw wasn’t his end. He could see beyond it and what was there was God’s love.

That’s what we lose track of sometimes, when we get so wrapped up in our own worries and fears. At least I did.

Anyway, as I sat there in bed, pondering that revelation, something happened: I grew calm, really peaceful, and my darkness and my fears just kind of slipped away. It wasn’t anything I did that made that happen.

I knew then, that no matter what, whether George came back safe from the war or not, whether we had a long life together or not, I knew that in the end, -- in the real end of things, -- George and I would be safe in God’s love. Beyond my fears, there was light.

Since then, my fears haven’t gone away, but they don’t overwhelm me anymore. My fears are my cross, Paul.

So, to answer your question, all these crucifixes I collect, they just remind me of the hope and love that lies beyond them. In that hope, Paul, I bear my cross.”
He sat there for a few minutes, thinking about what she had just said told him.

“But Gram,” he said at last, “you’re so full of life and so involved in everything. The cross part I get, at least I think I do, but denying yourself, I don’t know, shouldn’t we follow our own path? … it all seems kind of negative, stifling … I never liked that passage.”

“Paul”, she said, “the old me, that’s who I thought I was: me, by myself, without God. I’m glad I denied her. I like God’s image of me better than my own.

And you know, Mr. Graduate Student, God is infinite. He’s transcendent – not bound by space or time. If you really want to go places, follow Him.

I don’t think He’s ever led two people down the exact same path.

Now, how about a cookie?”