

Good Friday 2014

A Unique Day

There is no other day like this in the Church's year of faith. This is the only day in the liturgical year when Mass is not celebrated. It is a uniquely somber day that Saint Ambrose once called "a day of bitterness".

Yet we call this day, at least in English, "Good Friday" and we can find many references in Scripture & Tradition to the "glory of the Cross". The Baltimore Catechism tells us that this day is called "good" because by dying for us, 'Christ showed us his great love and purchased for us every blessing.' We speak of the "glory" of the Cross not because we wish to glorify suffering and death but rather because on the Cross Jesus showed us the true glory of the Lord: God's glory is his triune self-giving love and it is love stronger than sin and more powerful than death. On Good Friday we encounter God's goodness and glory in the Crucified Savior.

What Is in Our Hearts Today?

How have we entered into this day? What sentiments filled our hearts as we listened and took part in the reading of the Passion of the Lord? What intentions will we bring to the intercessions the Church offers today on behalf of people everywhere? And what will fill our hearts as we reverence the Cross, the Tree of Life? What will we say today to the Crucified Lord whom we shall receive in Holy Communion?

Saint Catherine of Sienna would urge us to contemplate "the overflowing depths of the Lord's charity in choosing to stoop down to our humanity." In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola tells us to ask for "sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his passion for our sins." St. Ignatius would have us enter into the suffering Jesus endured in our humanity, so that we might experience true grief, consternation, and sorrow for our sins.

St. Theresa of Avila also tells us that the only sure way to gain access to the divinity of Christ, to the glory of the Resurrection and newness of life, is through the sacred humanity of Jesus. How often, though, we'd like to skip the Cross and go right to the Resurrection. Yet, as Pope Francis somewhere wrote, "We must contemplate the reality of the passion in the flesh of Jesus and in our own flesh."

The Way of the Cross

So on this Good Friday, let us walk the way of the Cross. Jesus assumed our human nature to join himself to us. Let us now join ourselves to him; let us see if there is anything in our experience that will help us, if ever so feebly, to understand the immensity of what he suffered and overwhelming good he attained for us by dying on the Cross.

If you have ever spent the night worrying about your loved ones or about an illness or about some intractable problem, then join yourself to Jesus in the Garden as he experiences the anguish of taking on his shoulders the sins of the world. "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!"

If you've ever been unjustly criticized or condemned for defending the truth, then stand with Christ as he is examined by the chief priests and elders. Stand also with Christ as the crowds shout their verdict, "Crucify Him" and as Pilate pronounces his uncertain sentence of condemnation. It was for our guilt that Jesus was condemned.

If ever you have been humiliated or maltreated by others, look upon Jesus scourged for our sins, mocked, and crowned with thorns. By his stripes, Isaiah tells us, we are healed. His crown of thorns is true kingship, for in the realm of love, he reigns supreme.

If along the way of life you've ever needed a helping hand, think of disciples who met Jesus along the way with tears and think of the heavy crosses of the poor, the sick, and the suffering that we are asked each day to help carry; let us hasten to their side! And if you've fallen into sin, even habitually, ask Jesus for the grace to arise and continue along the way of holiness through the worthy reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

At the Foot of the Cross

At length we stand at the foot of the Cross with Mary, the Mother of Jesus and with the disciple whom Jesus loved, St. John the Evangelist, from whose Gospel today's reading of the Passion is taken. We mortals fear death and all of us have grieved over the death of our loved ones. So it is that we, like the beloved disciple, stand with Mary at the foot of the Cross. Is there any sorrow like her sorrow? Did anyone share more fully in Jesus' suffering than she? Let us hear Jesus say to us, "Behold

your Mother!" She leads us to Jesus!

At length Jesus tells us he thirsts not for water but for our love. In our need for love, let us hear the Savior seeking ours. As Jesus gives up his spirit and there comes forth blood and water – From his wounded side comes the Blood of the Eucharist and the Water of Baptism. Let us never absent ourselves from Mass or the Sacraments.

Hopeful Sorrow

St. Ignatius was right in urging us to contemplate Christ's death with genuine interior sorrow and contrition for our sins. But the sorrow he invites us to experience is not the sorrow of the hopeless. It is rather a way of opening our hearts so that the redeeming love of Christ can reach into the depths of our soul, into the hidden corners of our lives, into those areas of our lives that remain, for want of a better word, "unredeemed". It is a moment of great honesty, a moment in which presumption may not stand. This is that moment to entrust ourselves and the whole of our lives to the One who loved us to the very end.

An ancient hymn proclaims, "God hath reigned from a tree!" May his Kingdom come; his will be done in us! May the love of the crucified Savior reign in our hearts, now and forever! Amen.