

Homily for Good Friday, 2024

Isaiah 52.13-53.12, Hebrews 4.14-16; 5.7-9

John 18.1-19.42

Today marks the second time during Holy Week that we proclaim the Lord's Passion. On Palm Sunday we read from the Gospel of Mark. Today and every Good Friday we read the Passion from the Gospel of John.

Today's first reading of the Prophet Isaiah reminds us that people are willing to give their lives for others. We may know someone or perhaps can give an example of someone willing to give up their life for another. Yet it is rarer to meet someone willing to give their life for someone they do not know. Good Friday invites us to meditate on our willingness to give up our lives for others. Are we willing to follow Jesus and give ourselves for all others, even those who reject you, who hate you, and despise you? This is today's invitation and challenge.

St John's Gospel has Jesus going across the Kidron Valley (v.1). St. Thomas Aquinas helps us understand the beauty of this passage, "The Cedron brook is at the foot of the Mount of Olives, where there was a garden called Gethsemane. In Greek, Kidron, in effect, is a brook of cedars... it is fitting that He cross the Cedron brook, for Cedron is interpreted to mean an overshadowing, and by His passion Christ removed the shadow of sin and of the law, and stretching out His arms on the cross, He protected us under the shadow of His arms. So then it is fitting that the betrayal of Jesus occurs in a garden, for Jesus satisfied the sin of our first parents which was committed in a garden. St. Thomas Aquinas also states it is suitable because "by His passion, he is leading us into another garden, a paradise. Christ bore His cross as a king does His scepter; His cross is the sign of His glory, which is His universal dominion over all things."

Jesus suffered and died on the Cross for our salvation; he also told us to take up our crosses daily and follow Him. Jesus' crucified image serves as a powerful reminder of what He endured out of His divine love for our sake and of the true cost of our discipleship: the willingness to endure every pain, hardship, and humiliation to attain eternal life and be with Him forever. The crucified Christ reveals to us the power of redemptive suffering. When we join Jesus on the road to Calvary, and on the cross itself through our spiritual offering of suffering, we do not join Him in defeat but in victory!

Through Jesus' redemption, everyone is invited to receive forgiveness, healing, and everlasting life. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, Christ endured His Passion mainly in silence, obediently accepting His Father's plan for the ransom of

humanity from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus Christ is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is “unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time, it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience” (CCC 614). In the Gospel of Matthew 16.24, Jesus calls His disciples (us) “to take up his cross and follow me.” The Passion, the suffering, and death as pictured on the crucifix are our reminders of God’s love and mercy for each of us. St. Rose of Lima states, “Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.”

My friends, when we gaze upon the crucifix, let us recall the mercy and love that Jesus endured for each of us. Let us remember every time we look at a crucifix, to reflect on the sacrifice – the horrific suffering, commitment, redemption, and most of all, the love of God. His suffering and dying should not and is not looked at as a defeat, for it is a VICTORY! Let the crucifix be a call, an inspiration for us to “take up our cross and follow Him!”