



Good Friday



Date: Friday, April 14, 2017 | **Season:** Sacred Paschal Triduum | **Year:** A

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13–53

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 31:2, 6, 12–13, 15–17, 25 | **Response:** Luke 23:46

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:7–9

Gospel Acclamation: Philippians 2:8–9

Gospel Reading: John 18:1–19

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

We must never forget that what we have just heard happened for us. That God so loved us all, that he allowed his Son to come into the world, to die so as to take away our sins. This is why we call this day ‘Good’ Friday. Because it is the day that death and sin were conquered.

Last week I invited us all to contemplate ourselves in the Passion. There are many moving and uncomfortable moments, too difficult and too painful to contemplate. But we must not run away from that pain and discomfort.

There are several characters that are mentioned where we might have found ourselves today: Perhaps in the actions of Judas who betrayed Jesus; or of Simon Peter who abandoned and denied him; perhaps we saw ourselves in the soldiers who ‘were just following orders’ as they captured, bound, scourged and crucified Our Lord; or perhaps we were among the Holy Women who stood at the Cross, or were with Joseph who came afterwards to bury Jesus.

One of the differences between John’s Passion that we hear today, and of Matthew’s that we heard last week, is that Jesus appears more King-like. In John’s Gospel the Baptist greets Jesus as the Lamb of God, but we know he is the Lamb, that we heard in the first reading who shall be led to slaughter. His Kingship is not like other rulers, and neither is his throne of grace. It is not rich or comfortable – but rather it was plain and designed to cause pain: It is the wood of the cross which we are all about to venerate.

This is not so much about venerating him who died on the cross, as it is venerating the instrument of our salvation. The cross was a cruel device devised by the Romans to cause intense suffering. Every breath on that cross would cause pain for the one nailed to it. And Our Lord, having been abandoned, denied, insulted and found to be criminal would be bearing all of this suffering alone.

We can ask why? Why was there no other way? The point is that there is suffering in the world. It would be nice if there wasn't. But God's answer to suffering is not to wish it away, but to take it all upon himself. In dying on the Cross, the instrument that would have caused death, God allows it to become the source of new life. We know that Good Friday will be followed by Easter Sunday; that death will be followed by resurrection. And therein lies our hope and our entire reason to be Christian. If Jesus did not die and rise from the dead, there would be no reason at all for anything he said to have continued down the ages. What we celebrate in these three days is our faith, and our hope, that the Love of God conquers death, it wipes away our sin. The mercy and justice of God is not according to human standards, but always surpasses them in generosity – because God's love is infinite, and his forgiveness certain.

We must consider today our relationship to Jesus in the Passion. I hope you were able to find yourself, to place yourself, to see yourself in relation to Jesus. Jesus does not turn away from the cross, even though we might have turned away from him – even if we cannot stand what is happening to him. We know that he is suffering because of our sins – not to punish us, but to liberate us, and to free us. He is not judging us, but loving us on the Cross. There is no unkind word from him – only a desire to do God's will. Our forgiveness and our salvation was costly – it cost the Son of God his life – but having been forgiven, let us not forget to live with the hope that Jesus offers us, so that we might have life and live it to the full. This is why we call today Good Friday. Because sin and death were conquered. Because the Cross is the symbol of our hope, it is the symbol of God's love for us, it is the symbol of our faith. That is why we place it in so many different places – to help us not forget. That is why we begin our prayers and recognize each other as Christians because we always begin in the name of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – but we always do so by making the sign of the cross – to remind us that it is the cross that connects us to each other and to

God. For it was on the Cross that Jesus, fully human and fully divine, fulfilled his Mission to save us. Let us always remember to give thanks to God for using what was to cause death and suffering, to bring life and hope into the world.

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