

Good Friday Homily (based upon Isaiah 52:13-53:12, St. Paul to the Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9 and The Passion according to John Chapters 18 and 19)

- We humans do not like to suffer. The idea of “carrying our cross” is frightening to most of us. We do everything in our power to avoid it. However, we know that no one alive can escape suffering, of some type, at some point in our lives.
- Yet today, on Good Friday, our Church talks about the “value” of suffering and uses words like “redemptive” and “salvific” to describe Jesus’ suffering. On Good Friday we recall the tremendous suffering and pain Jesus Christ, the only Son of God endured for *us*.
- St. John Chrysostom tells us the Cross was once a symbol of disdain, a symbol of condemnation but today, thanks to Jesus, the Cross is a symbol of hope, blessing and reconciliation for *us*. But what do the words “*for us*” really mean. What are the gifts Jesus gives to *us* by His suffering, by His enduring the Cross? I would like to focus on three of those gifts this Good Friday.
- First Gift: In The Book of Genesis we see God established a relationship, a covenant of Love, with our first parents. There was never any contemplation of suffering or pain or death in that original relationship God intended. But something went wrong. Our first parents broke that covenant by placing their will ahead of God’s will – thought they knew better than God (remember the “apple”). But in God’s great love for us, in His great mercy toward us, He would not let that separation last. Instead God came to live among us (Jesus) to lead us back to that original relationship He intended.
- Through Jesus, God gave us the message of our salvation: Love God, and Love one another. Jesus gave us this message by word and example. He lived among us and

lovingly taught us, gently corrected us; healed us. Jesus told us I am going to live my life a certain way, value certain things (love and service to others-especially the poor and needy) and if you follow me and live this way - you will be restored to that original relationship with God.

- We know Jesus' message met with great resistance by those in power who thought this simple carpenter's son could not be the Savior God promised. So they set out to get rid of Him, silence Him. First they offered Jesus a way out. Jesus could have avoided all this; walked away at any time. He could have told His enemies, "Just spare my life and I'll deny everything I ever taught, you'll never hear from me again." But He didn't!!! He came to lead us back home, to give us the message, the direction back: *Love God and Love one another*. Jesus would not deny this message, so He gave up His life, went to the cross to prove the truth of His message; to prove to us that sin and death have no power over Him (and no power over us if we follow Him). He showed us eternal life is real and we belong there. And so the First gift: ***The Cross confirms Jesus' message.***
- Second Gift: Jesus told us: "Love God and love each other". It sounds almost easy to do doesn't it? But we know its not that easy, especially the loving others part. After several days of isolation at home I'm sure I'm driving my wife and daughter crazy. We are human. Despite our best efforts to follow Jesus' direction we often stumble and fall. There are times we fail, times when we sin.
- When we offend others and want to make amends we offer an apology, sometimes we present something (a gift) as a "peace offering".
- As Jesus hung upon the cross he prayed to His heavenly Father: " Father, forgive them they do not know what they are doing". Jesus was asking His heavenly Father to accept

His suffering and death on the cross as a sacrifice, a peace offering for sinners who repent. That prayer, those words transcend time. It was intended for those present on that Good Friday and intended for all His followers throughout time, each of us when we stumble and sin. When we pray to God our Father for forgiveness, we can offer Jesus suffering and pain and death on the cross as a peace offering, a perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of *our* sins. That is what the Church means when it teaches that Jesus died for our sins. Jesus' death on the Cross is the perfect sacrifice. And so the Second gift: ***The Cross is our "peace offering"***.

- Third Gift: God does not will us suffering. Sometimes the world creates it for us; sometimes we create it for ourselves through our choices; sometimes others create it for us.
- We see Jesus praying to His Father throughout His ministry: for guidance, strength and comfort; especially at those difficult moments like in the Garden just before His arrest.
- As Jesus hung on the Cross those present heard Him say "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit." Words of total trust in his heavenly Father. Jesus spoke to the Father, knew the Father was near in His suffering.
- God does not will our suffering but He *does will* that as we experience suffering, we trust. Trust He is with us, close by, and loving. Trust that God will turn suffering into good- somehow.
- When we are at our weakest, carrying our cross, God is closest and at His strongest. We just need to look and be open to His presence.
- I have known many people, myself included, that have experienced physical and/or emotional suffering and have tried to shoulder it on their own. Only when we realized

the cross was too heavy, only when we realized we needed God, only when we knelt before the Cross of Jesus and said “ I need your help” – did we realize God was there all along, waiting for us to listen to Him in, waiting for us to take the help He was holding out all along. And so the third gift: ***God draws even closer when we carry our cross.***

If we were worshipping together this Good Friday at one point in the service we would line up to approach and venerate (kiss or gently touch) the cross of Christ. We can pay this same respect individually from our homes. Take any cross and spend a few moments gazing at it, gazing at Jesus who gave His life on that cross that we might live.