

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 3rd 2015

We call this Friday “Good” because on this day we remember how much God loves us. On this day we “celebrate” the passion of Jesus for us. How can we possibly “celebrate” the suffering of anyone, let alone Jesus? Because Jesus suffered our suffering. The suffering and death of Jesus is God’s own entry into all that we suffer, including death itself. Jesus not only knows and understands, he is with us in our suffering and death. His passion, death and resurrection transforms ours. Today we celebrate how his suffering was that of a “servant,” for it was through what he endured that we are set free from the power of our sin, the devastation of death. “By his stripes we are healed.”

There can be an incredible intimacy in today’s reflection. As we “behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the Savior of the world,” two powerful graces are offered us. We can venerate, and thereby embrace, the whole mystery of love that that cross represents today, and enter into two gifts.

1) This is for me. It is personal. It’s about my sins - my personal independence, rebellion, choices that are selfish, failures to choose what is right and loving and heroic.

2) This is for everyone. It is universal. Today, I can stand at the foot of the cross and realize I am in solidarity with everyone else there - also loved and forgiven.

I “feel” this day is “solemn.” It’s about a past event, but it is made quite real today by my reflection upon it. It “happens” today, in the sense that I let it happen in me today. So the “seriousness” of the day is not just sadness and guilt. If that were all there is, the day would lose its power. Today I feel the deep feelings that well up inside of me when I open my heart to the death of a loved one, for me.

When I open my emotions to receive the gift of his sacrifice, that I might be free from what enslaves and terrifies me, the overall feeling that grows in strength today is gratitude.

Then, it feels like a very good Friday, indeed.

The gospel is so rich today. The following reflections come from “chewing” this powerful story. I pray they might further even deeper our reflection and gratitude today.

“They came looking for him with lanterns and torches and weapons.”

Such an irony. Looking for the Light of the Word and the Prince of Peace with torches and weapons. Oh, Lord, be Light in the midst of my darkness. Please bring peace to my heart.

“Whom are you looking for?”

The first words of Jesus in this Gospel are, “What are you looking for?” There is no other more important question. Oh, Lord, free my restless heart to seek you and you alone, in all my desiring and in all my loving.

“Shall I not drink the cup the Father gave me?”

As he washed his disciples’ feet, and gave them his body and blood as a sacrament of self-sacrificing love, he gave us an example of how to love, how to say “yes” to our vocations. Oh, Lord, I love your example, your way. Please free me to drink the cup the Father offers me, that I might love as you have loved me.

“Then the maid who was the gatekeeper said to Peter, ‘You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?’ He said, ‘I am not.’”

My life has many, more embarrassing, denials. The pain of Jesus’ suffering is related to my personal sin, my own unique ways of denying him. Oh, Lord, I’m so sorry for choosing whatever I choose to avoid being your disciple. Please forgive me, and heal me.

"They cried out, 'Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your king?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified."

I can hear my own autonomy and stubborn independence. I am imagining all the things I do, positions I take, patterns I continue which shout, "I have no allegiance, but to myself!" Dear Lord, you were handed over for my offenses and omissions. Thank you. Through the surrender of your suffering, death, resurrection and gift of your Spirit, open my heart that you might more and more become the Lord of my life.

"So they took Jesus, and, carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified him."

Whatever "cross" I bear, you have already carried. You have stumbled and fallen to the ground under its weight. For me. That I might not, from this day forward, feel I am carrying my cross alone. Thank you.

"After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I thirst.'

There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. "

I imagine that at this moment you completely take on the "thirst" of the world. Everything. From our crude and banal desires, to our deepest longings, to our hunger and thirst for justice. You finally taste what your Father has prepared for you to drink. Then, all that you came to do, to be, is accomplished. For me. Then, you can humbly bow your head and give over your Spirit. Thank you.

"Blood and water flowed from his side."

Today I desire to be immersed in the life-giving love that flows from your side. It is your death that I have been baptized into. Baptized to be with you, like you. A servant, who does not resist suffering in order to love more completely.

"He died and was buried in a tomb on 'preparation day.'"

You died on the day the lambs were sacrificed in the temple, to prepare for the Passover meal. You really died and were buried. That I might pass from sin to freedom, from death to life, without fear. Oh, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Take away my sins and give me peace. Thank you.

* This reflection first appeared on Good Friday in 2002.

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