

GOOD FRIDAY LITURGY 2016
HOMILY – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
HEBREWS 10



BIRTH – LIFE – DEATH – ALL STEPS IN A PROCESS...THEN WHAT HAPPENS? ASSUREDLY A RATIONAL QUESTION...OFTEN POSED BY MANY – OR...NEVER BY OTHERS...

HOLY WEEK, IN PARTICULAR TODAY - GOOD FRIDAY - CALLS US TO CONSIDER THE MATTER OF "NEXT"...SEEKING ANSWER IS A PROCESS WE ARE CALLED TO UNDERTAKE...

GOOD FRIDAY...A SHADOW OF GOOD THINGS THE GOSPEL...THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS... SOME THINGS NOW...SOME THINGS TO COME...

WHAT IS THIS "GOOD FRIDAY BUSINESS" TRULY ABOUT?...WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?...DID HE REALLY HAVE TO DIE?...IF JESUS IS REALLY GOD HE COULD HAVE JUMPED OFF THE CROSS...AND JUST HOW DO WE KNOW THIS REALLY HAPPENED?...FOR THAT MATTER WAS THERE REALLY A REAL GUY CALLED JESUS...?

"I FIND THIS JUST A BIT FAR-FETCHED"...SAY SOME...

All real questions...all understandable questions ...all questions I have really been asked...ALL REALLY IMPORTANT

All these questions have an answer...they really do...

How important is this...what's in it for me...really...?

Quick answer...?...LIFE or DEATH

Writer Flannery O'Connor's "Passover," – avoidance of death - catalyzed the biblical image Pope John Paul II adopted to describe the Christian journey through death to eternal life.

GIVEN OVER TO CYNICISM, SOME BOLDLY PROCLAIM, "LIFE IS A TOUGH PROCESS...THEN YOU DIE..."
Conversely...

Those who seriously and productively embrace the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus are given to optimism..."LIFE IS A FASCINATING PROCESS...WITH AND BECAUSE OF WHICH WE LIVE FULLY NOW...AND FOREVER..."

Let us pick up where we left off last night...the Maundy Thursday Mass...the hinge pin between the 'old way' and the 'new way'...transition from the temporary fix to the permanent fix...the question

Because we signed on - embraced the latter perspective – today is compelling as we revisit the event of 2000 years ago...the Crucifixion of Jesus...indeed a compelling event in the life process...yet not the end...

Today, just as we have done throughout this, and every, Church Year we fit ourselves into a Procession of Life...we do this because Church/Liturgical Life mimics what we commonly and quite rightly call 'real life'...real life with its twists and turns, points high and low, joys/sorrows, successes/failures ...elements present in every life...

Our Life Process commenced on Advent Sunday with a compelling liturgical revelation of the course to be undertaken... then to the Crèche on Christmas...Epiphany transported us to the original baptismal font as we saw Jesus baptized in Jordan and grow up...then to the wilderness during Lent...then the long Passover procession to Jerusalem...

Last night, following the Maundy Thursday Mass we processed from the Seder to the Altar of Rest and Meditation...

Those systematic processions draw us quite naturally to this very moment and place...

This is a point in the process we don't like very much...some, just as 2000 years ago, find Good Friday so ugly, so painful, they turn away...others choose to ignore it altogether..."no matter", simply say they... For us, it does matter...it did then, it does now...from this process, we learn more...it calls us to the next steps in our lives. Caution...it does not mean we are better than the others...just more aware...and from that

we shall benefit...if, that is, we maintain optimism...

Turning back to our 'Process of Life', let us consider the people of Passover...the Hebrews...the people who traveled to Jerusalem...the people whose trail we have followed and emulated all this week...our Palm Sunday Procession...Wednesday's Walk in Jerusalem – the Stations of the Cross...last evening's Maundy Thursday Mass...the transition from the Seder to that which, as Catholic Christendom evolved, has become our central liturgical practice, The Mass...followed last night and this morning by the watch at the Altar of Repose...meditating about Jesus' agonizing over the impending events upon which we focus today...

And that returns us to that series of vexing questions...what...?...did it have to be...?

To answer, we turn to the Epistle – the letter – to the Hebrews that set today's stage of understanding...

The Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things...only a faint outline of the good things to come... the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins. Because Jesus did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all.

Your only son Jesus Christ suffered death upon the Cross for our redemption, made there by offering himself as full perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the whole world for all time...[BCP–Canon] Sound familiar...?

Jesus offered one sacrifice for our sins, an offering that is effective forever, and then he sat down at the right side of God. With one sacrifice, then, he has made perfect forever those who are purified from sin.

TURNING NOW AWAY FROM THE HORROR OF THE CROSS...SEE...HE'S DEAD...I TOLD YOU SO...SAYS THE CYNIC...LET'S GO...I DON'T KNOW WHY WE EVEN BOTHERED TO LOOK...
Sound familiar...?

Likely, the answer is yes...because so many see Good Friday as only a death event...or they don't even see it at all. Certainly Good Friday is about the procession to the DEATH of Jesus and the awful manner in which it was made to occur...but in the final chapter it is truly about LIFE...for Jesus is about LIFE...he said so very clearly "I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.

What we must now do is seize upon that future...the gift of life...

Unlike any other day of the Church Year it is impossible to find even a hint of humor in Good Friday. Simultaneously, perverse optimism shines through the dark deeds of the day...the hope for humanity is articulated by the other two on their crosses...one got the message of redemption and life...one got dead...it remains to this day a matter of choices...we can choose life and light or we can choose dead and dark...(John 1.12)...

Even in the light of the dark deeds of sacrifice that bring us to our knees on this day there is the mercy that God wants for us and provides if we will just recognize, as did the centurion, **THIS IS ALL TRUE...**

Good Friday brings us, therefore to the foot of the cross...we stand with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and John watch with disbelief...here we make our choice...we may choose as did some, glance and hurry by ...or we stop, listen to the Centurion...we can choose to understand...

And if we choose to understand, we undertake another procession...that leads us, with Mary Magdalene, to the tomb...the ultimate procession to Life...

Good Friday is a **DEATH** and **LIFE** proposition...the choice is open to all...we know the choice God wants for us to choose...**LIFE**

