

GOOD FRIDAY LITURGY 2017
HOMILY – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
HEBREWS 10



“WHAT EXACTLY IS THIS HOLY WEEK STUFF ALL ABOUT...? A FREQUENT QUESTION FROM A CURIOUS, NON-PARTICIPATING ACQUAINTANCE. BEFORE I COULD ANSWER CAME THE RHETORICAL AFTERWORD...” YOU ‘CATHOLIC KIND OF PEOPLE’ SEEM OBSESSED WITH GOING TO CHURCH AND THE DEATH OF JESUS...

WELL NO...ACTUALLY THE OPPOSITE...IT IS ABOUT THE LIFE OF JESUS, OUR OWN AND YOURS, SAID I...THE DISCUSSION WAS FAR RANGING...AROUND TODAY –

**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 PERSON CALLED
JESUS...?**

**“I FIND ALL 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

GIVEN OVER TO CYNICISM, SOME BOLDLY PROCLAIM, **“LIFE IS A TOUGH PROCESS...THEN YOU DIE...”**

Converserly...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 - embracing the *rescue mission* – 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 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 coalesced to 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, many 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 again 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...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...

During Lent we have gained, through extra study, additional insight into the price Jesus paid to rescue us - redeem the sins of the whole world...

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 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...

Sounds familiar...Jesus *offered one sacrifice for 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 CROSS...SEE...HE'S DEAD...I TOLD YOU SO... SAYS THE CYNIC...LET'S GO...I DON'T KNOW WHY

WE EVEN BOTHERED WITH THIS IN THE FIRST PLACE...

This too, sounds familiar...because so many see Good Friday only as 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 comfort in Good Friday. Paradoxically, 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 personal rescue and life...the other, only death...it remains to this day a matter of choices...we can choose life and light or we can choose death and darkness...(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 watching 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**

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