

## GOOD FRIDAY 2018

### HOMILY – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

#### FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

##### HEBREWS 10.1-25 ST. JOHN 19.1-37



What's so good about "Good Friday"? What's good about the dark and bleak event celebrating a day of suffering and death for Jesus? Where is the "good" in Good Friday?

We started our Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday...we asked God in the words of Psalm 51 to create pure hearts in us...to put new and loyal spirits in us. We began to understand the ashes placed on our foreheads are in the shape of the cross...that the cross is ultimately about LIFE...not death.

Our Lenten Study focused on reading selected Psalms. In her book *The Psalms: Gateway to Prayer*...Jeanne Kun expressed hope we would come to know the power and pleasure of praying the Psalms as we make them our own...as if we had written them.

Jesus must have spent time in the desert praying the Psalms...he knew them by heart...to get himself ready for the mission ahead. It is appropriate we begin the Good Friday Liturgy with the words of Psalm 22...the Psalm Jesus cried from the cross, "God, my God, why have you abandoned me."

Thomas Merton in *Bread in the Wilderness* wrote of the Psalms...

*...When we recite the Psalms we must learn to recognize in them the suffering and triumphant Messiah, confessing in him with our mouth and believing in our heart that God has raised him from the dead. Then we reap the abundant fruits of His Redemption.*

The key word in what Merton writes is Redemption...the action of regaining possession of something in exchange for payment...the action of clearing a debt. The debt Jesus cancelled on the cross for us is why we are here today.

Our journey continued Last Sunday...Palm Sunday...we were the crowd proclaiming Jesus to be our King...only to turn around and shout, "Crucify him." We must identify with that crowd if we are to get the "why" of today. The question we always ask...why did Jesus have to die?

This brings us to the events of last night...Maundy Thursday...Jesus gave us the greatest gift...his Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar...not a virtual gift...his real Body and Blood. And he gave us a new commandment...we should show our love for each other as much as he has shown his love for us. "If you love me", Jesus said, "Keep my commandments."

And now we find ourselves at the foot of the cross along with Mary and John and the others who had the courage to stand by Jesus...what do we see?

There is a large crowd watching the drama unfold...some laugh at Jesus...for them this is a source of amusement. We don't laugh...there is nothing funny about the Crucifixion of Jesus. Perhaps some of us are moved to tears...that's OK...it means we are beginning to understand the scope of what we are witnessing...why Jesus allowed himself to be executed like a common criminal.

Let's ask ourselves again...what's so "good" about Good Friday. Why not call it "Bad Friday?" Why is this a day of celebration and not a day of overwhelming sadness and grief...why will we NOT leave here today believing all is lost and hopeless?

Good Friday is "good" because Jesus accomplished what we cannot do on our own...he rescued us from ourselves. We create messes in our lives...thoughts, words, actions that lead us away from God. The things we think give meaning to life...wealth, power, security, authority, prestige, our own sense of self-importance...often work against us...turning our lives upside down...leaving us feeling alone and empty.

Father Massey Shepherd writes in the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*...the name given for today..."Good Friday"...has its roots in medieval England. He goes on to say we should be happy calling today. "Good Friday"...

*...because the name serves to dispel the gloom that might settle on today's observances by reminding us of the blessings that have come to us from the Cross of Christ. The name also helps us in some way to remind us of the primitive Christian celebration of this day as one of victorious conquest by Christ over sin and death."*

Good Friday is “good” because it is the ultimate act of *Divine Reversal*. God’s willingness to become a human male and walk among us...to experience everything we experience as human beings, sorrow and happiness, despair and joy, anger and forgiveness, feelings of abandonment and certainty of rescue...turned our upside down world right side up again...hopelessness gets replaced by hope.

Hope is at the core of the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews...

...“*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.*”

Key words...“ONCE AND FOR ALL”...never to be repeated...Jesus is the “*full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.*”

This is good news for us only when we admit we do things we shouldn’t...we don’t do the things we should. We don’t want to admit the part we played in putting Jesus up on the cross...we don’t like to use the word sin...because it means we have to admit we make conscious choices to walk our own way and not God’s way.

Sin is our deliberate disobedience of the Great Commandment to love God above everything else...especially those material and emotional things we hold near and dear and which often become obstacles in our way...drawing us away from God’s love. Sin is our refusal to love others in the same way we want to be loved...either because we don’t like them or we think they aren’t worth our time. God repeatedly shows us we are worth his time!

Good Friday is “good” because as terrible as that day was, it had to happen for us to receive the joy of Easter. God does not like sin...in the General Confession at Mass...we acknowledge our sins in thought, word and deed...justly provoke God’s anger. God’s anger against sin gets poured out on Jesus, instead. Jesus is the perfect sacrificial substitute in order for forgiveness and salvation to be poured out on the entire world.

Forgiveness is not something we can earn from God...it is a free gift...but it does come with a steep price...it cost God his Son...it cost Jesus his life...and the cost for us is we must take action on being forgiven. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes extensively on what we must do to take full advantage of God’s forgiveness...we must repent...confess our sins...and try to do better. Inaction equates with refusing God’s forgiveness.

This brings us back to the foot of the cross along with Mary and John and the others...still asking ourselves...“Why did Jesus have to die...wasn’t there another way?” The answer to that question is NO!

Good Friday is “good” because Jesus paid the price we should have paid. He has guaranteed through his own suffering and death and resurrection...we won’t have to stay dead forever.

It is on the cross the suffering of all humanity and God’s forgiveness come together. Jesus endured the humiliating execution of a common criminal on Good Friday...knowing it led to his resurrection...and our salvation.

The following contemporary prayer by author Gregory Coles is compelling:

*“Give me eyes, God, to see the triumph of the cross. Even when all seems lost, even as I mourn Your death, remind me that You conquered the grave by sneaking inside of it and unraveling it from the inside out. In the midst of defeat and disappointment, sing songs of victory over me. Turn my world on its head so I can recognize the upside-down Kingdom of God at work.”*

*Divine Reversal* is complete. We now know what’s “good” about Good Friday. We now know why Jesus had to die. Without the Crucifixion...there is no resurrection. Without Good Friday...there is no Easter. Without the death of Jesus...life everlasting for us would not have been possible.

Good Friday is about LIFE...not death...Jesus made certain of that when he died so we wouldn’t have to stay dead. God offers us life forever commencing now...it’s a choice he wants us to make...and it is why we call today GOOD!

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