

Good Friday

29<sup>th</sup> March 2024

'Triduum II, Humility in Suffering, in Dying, in Offering Mercy'

Is 52–53: *He was pierced through for our faults*

Ps 30: *My life is in Your hands, deliver me from the hands of those who hate me.*

Heb 4; 5: *During His life on earth He offered up prayer and entreaty ...*

Jn 18–19: the Passion according to John.

At the outset of this Holy Week, on Palm Sunday we were given words by St Paul of an early Christian hymn. Let's hear a little of that passage again now: "*Christ Jesus, ... though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" (Phil 2) At the Last Supper, in the Upper Room, as we commemorated last night, Our Lord Jesus humbled Himself at the feet of the Apostles, washing their feet as a lowly servant; then He humbled Himself even more to offer Himself to them, and to us, in the simple forms of the Holy Eucharist: His whole divine Self in the consecrated Bread & Wine of the New Covenant. In the celebration of the early Church, there, His humility is surprising, but manifested in a context of love and fellowship — at least,

once Judas had exited. But that Last Supper was a prelude, a necessary preface, to the central action of this Sacred *Triduum* of holy days: Good Friday.

Today, then, we see that humiliation of Jesus enacted not sacramentally, but physically, bloodily: that same one Sacrifice of the Cross. The *Passion reading from St John* reminds us of the full horror of this maltreatment of Jesus: the verbal aggression in the Sanhedrin trial; the slappings; the unkind vacillation and spinelessness of Pilate, unwilling to attend to justice and to truth; the scourging with its extreme loss of blood; the soldiers' rude mockery with purple robe, and crown of thorns pressed into his skull; the crowd's baying for blood; the weary walk to Calvary bearing the cross-beam of His execution; the indignity of His being stripped completely naked; the barbaric nailing through wrists and ankles; the hoisting up the scaffold in public view by the city walls; His company on the Cross being two known criminals; the hours of increasing breathlessness on the Cross as His life ebbed away; the dreadful sour wine offered as His only comfort

in those last moments ... This is the awful reality of the Passion of Jesus, a humiliating and agonizing few hours, suffered willingly, quietly, acceptingly. How low could He have been brought? No lower, surely? Was anyone's inhumane treatment and violent death ever as brutal as this? Possibly, but unlikely. We can hardly imagine it, can we? — even with all the violence so common in modern films, yet personally to imagine being on the receiving end of all that Jesus endured: surely, beyond us? And yet, this is the humbling of His divine Self that Jesus allowed. It is not meted out upon Him as a Victim, not really. It's undertaken willingly, a divine choice to remain faithful to the human condition, to the very end, whatever the bitter and bloody consequences. As He openly had told His followers beforehand:

*“The Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order to take it up again. No-one take it from Me; I lay it down of My own free will, and as it is in My power to lay it down, so it is in My power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by My Father”* (Jn 10:18).

How can we begin to comprehend this abject humiliation of Good Friday, taken up by Jesus as a Sacrifice? Only, as

He says, as a loving plan of the Eternal Father: Jesus, *obedient unto death, death on a Cross* ... Obedient to the Father, not by way of submission to the bloodlust of a vengeful God; just the opposite, in fact: obedience to the *tender* Father who offers His only-begotten Son as the *only* way to reach the ears of sinful, proud humanity, and place the example and the sacrament of divine reconciliation manifestly before us — despite everything we throw at Him, howsoever cruel.

If only His own people had read their beloved *Isaiah* texts, and understood those powerful, prophetic words — we heard them there in the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading (Is 52/53), the 4<sup>th</sup> *Song of the Suffering Servant* — maybe they would have seen more readily the nature of Jesus as the Messiah, the one true Christ of God. But perverse humanity, steeped in sin, can react so unthinkingly, so harshly. When Jesus “was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins” He soaked up the poison of evil, and with every blow silently suffered He drew out from humanity the mindlessness of death-dealing roughness and returned just

love. “*On Him lies a punishment that bring us peace, and by His wounds, we are healed.*”

What should we do, now, this Good Friday? What *is* there to do? If you’re like me, on late Good Friday afternoon it can seem a bit dead; there’s very little to do, very little we can say that has not already been said by Christ Himself in those utterances from the Cross. We need to embrace that emptiness and enter that silence: silently praying and giving thanks; entering into yourself and finding simple words of love & thanks to Jesus for what He underwent for us. Just say, ‘Thank you, Jesus ... Thank you.’ After this Passion liturgy, be quiet; stay a few minutes in the profound silence that prevails at its end. Don’t rush to leave or chat, if possible, just wait a bit, recollect that you kissed the wood of the Cross out of deep affection for the One who loves us beyond all other, and who by that wood won us to Himself, won over our hearts. And *repent of your sins*, those burdens that loaded dear Jesus as He made His way to Calvary. Maybe you have taken the chance this Lent to have Jesus unburden you, lift

off your shoulders — and on to His — those weighty and stifling sins; maybe you have already in Confession recently had Him take them away to lighten your life. If you haven’t, then in the silence of Good Friday — in the silence that follows such a good death, the perfect death of God-made-man — consider availing yourself of the grace and mercy that flows from the pierced heart of the Saviour. Come to Confession. In no better way could you complete the spiritual offering of this day to God. (I’ll be in the sacristy/Confessional soon after the service ends.)

The Cross of Jesus’s death is the axis on which the world turns; Good Friday is the very centre-point of all history — let’s never forget this. *All reality turns on this sacred mystery.* We are right to give our whole attention to this, and to order our lives by the lessons of humility, willing Sacrifice, and mercy, taught us by the divine Teacher from that revered pulpit of the Cross. Let us listen to Him, as He meekly announces, “*Consummatum est!* — It is accomplished!” He has done all things for us, a new Creation, and indeed it is very good. A very *Good Friday.*