Good Friday(2023)

*“Let him be crucified!”*

At the time of the Last Supper and the next day no one *comprehended* the cosmic events taking place in front of them. The religious leaders were blind to the truth standing right before them; one of his handpicked followers, Judas (no doubt for what he believed to be good reasons, such as a public trial), betrayed Jesus to those who completely loathed him. The night had gone quickly from bad to worse.

The early morning continued the downward spiral with Jesus being hauled before Caiaphas; struck by a Temple guard; getting mocked by King Herod and his entourage who wanted to see a... magic show, then getting beaten almost to death by Roman soldiers and then being brought before Pilate for cross-examination. None of these new figures of the Passion **comprehended** what was unfolding before them either.

Soon thereafter later Jesus was told his life was not worth that of a dangerous criminal, Barabbas. Immediately after that he was made to carry his own instrument of death as far as his human spirit could, and finally was attached like an ornament to his cross in front of gaping and mocking onlookers.

None of these other figures **comprehended** the cosmic activity around them **even** as Jesus began the *Twenty-Second Psalm* which spoke of the very events unfolding in real time in front of everyone. Even the women who stayed with his mother, Mary, did so out of love for her and for him.

The world then was oblivious to Christ's Passion. His passionate love for us. And if they had thought of it all, nothing would have made no sense. The Pharisees, after all, considered themselves glorious in God's eyes.

Only the Penitent Thief and the Roman Centurion grasped the regal nature of Jesus. Everyone else missed the universe rending meaning of Christ's Crucifixion. And that meaning is**:** that God loved mankind so much that he endured our hatred in return in order to save us.

What about us today, two thousand years later? Is the world still *oblivious*? In a sense no, given that many churches are and have been doing exactly what we have this week.

Yet, many consciously have decided that Christ's death and suffering were not important since **they** are "good people", and so they too miss the meaning of Holy Week. They miss out on the opportunity to grasp at the salvation which Jesus offers.

Even we here are also much like those weak and sinful individuals in our Lessons of the last few days. In our Collects today we pray for those who have not known Jesus "as revealed in the Gospel". Needless to say, that includes us.

For we **are** as the crowds who one moment yelled “hosanna!!” and "I love you Lord!" and then turned around and shouted, “crucify him!!” or "God why did you do this to me!?". We also act as the crowd did when we ignore his powerful grace by being irreverent around others or using his name in vain, or skipping church saying “I have something else I must do this Sunday”, or when we do not help our neighbor as we could.

We act like Pharisees when we worry about religious externals such as physically **being** in church but mentally outside planning earthly activities. And we act like Judas when we put obtaining worldly gain, such as working when we really have no obligation to do so on a Sunday.

Holy week liturgies in short function as another parable of Jesus. We are drawn in on Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, and then the rug is pulled out from under us as the story reveals the weakness of our own rationalizations. Holy Week paints a very dark picture of human nature, of the fallen world in which we still live, move and all call home. It is a picture mankind from the beginning and very much so today does not want to confront.

It is a world where darkness reigns, where people and nations commit vile acts, not the least of which is *indifference* to suffering or to those who look up to us for care. It is a place where people celebrate power and pleasure oblivious to their superfulousness. Modernization has brought good **and** evil to the world. It has helped medical care to flow quickly around the world, but also made it easier to hurt and kill many people very quickly.

In short, these liturgies of the past six days unmask the reality of human existence. A reality we try hard to conceal even from our own selves. Yet, like the puffed-up emperor in the famous children's story, we too ultimately are revealed as having no clothes. We still live very much in a world where people are all happy to destroy someone who threatens their sense of power and happiness, one who upsets their applecart.

Yet, by becoming aware of the emptiness of our lives we can and do begin to **comprehend** the reason for Christ's life and his Passion. Jesus himself was under no delusion. **He** comprehended what was unfolding all around him. Creation had gotten “full of” itself, put on airs as we all do, and had stopped listening to its maker. His masterpiece of **paradise,** of love**,** had been attacked by the acid of evil, especially pride, and was wasting away in every direction. Because he wanted us to stay in the masterpiece with him, he volunteered to come down personally... and restore it.

We have no record of how God the Father felt about His Son's crucifixion. But, we must assume he was displeased since Jesus begged his executioners forgiveness. At the Basilica at Notre Dame University there is the most unusual *La Pieta* statue I have seen. It is not Mary holding the lifeless Jesus. Rather it is God the Father holding His lifeless Son with a face, as a devote Jewish friend of ours who was with us noticed, a face suggesting, "so, it has come to this".

Since our Savior's Passion **many have given their lives** in martyrdom. They have been the seeds of the Church which continues his ministry to save souls from hell. The World even today still does not understand or embrace Christ's willing suffering which the Church now relives.

It still does not understand Christ because the world's focus is on short term temporal pleasure, not genuine happiness. Indeed, the patron saint of these times might be Judas who himself sought simply a **political** solution to suffering.

Yet, all Christians in the world for 2000 years have had the benefit of Christ's Passion to embrace for comfort: To comfort them in their own sufferings during both life and death, whether violently martyred or simply dying slowly over many years like countless, unnamed saints.

Many **inspirational legends** also have grown up since about the crucifixion. Some of them themselves have become the subject also of films and books such as *The Robe* and *Quo Vadis* both from the 1950s. The first has the legend that the Tribune in charge of the crucifixion, played by Richard Burton, won Christ's robe in the dice game on the hill. Using it to shelter his face in the following terrible storm tormented him. His life was changed and he himself went on to be martyred.

The second has the legend that later in life St. Peter was fleeing persecution in Rome when he saw Jesus coming towards him, going the other way...towards Rome. Peter looked at the Lord incredulously and said, “Quo Vadis!?” (Where are you going!?) Jesus stared at Peter and replied that he was going up to Rome to die **again** for his people. Chastened, St. Peter turned around immediately, and returned to Rome soon to be crucified himself.

AMEN.