

GOOD FRIDAY

Today we celebrate the Good Friday of our Lord's Passion, the moment when Jesus our Lord was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate at the provocation of His opponents, and put to suffer and was tortured, made to bear the heavy wooden cross, and eventually was crucified on the cross, and died. This is what we commemorate today, the day when our Lord Himself died for our sake.

Our experience of this reading tonight is stressed by everything around us. There is a profound sense of loss, of absence, in the church right now. No bells. No decorations. An empty tabernacle. A bare altar. This is the only day in the Church calendar when the Mass is not celebrated. We are almost in a state of suspended animation. All we can do is remember once more what was given for us. We reflect. We relive it. We grieve.

In chapels and churches around the world this day, people pray the Stations of the Cross and repeat Christ's steps and recite the ancient words that are engraved in our hearts: *"We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."*

The cross this day is our signpost, the center of our worship, and for good reason, because we embrace in a profound way its meaning, its power, and even its necessity. In a few minutes we will venerate it with a kiss or some other act of reverence - expressing in some small way that this instrument of death was also the key that unlocked for us our salvation. The cross, we affirm, was a means to an end, not an end itself.

Yet, for all its sorrow and pain, all its drama and tragedy, this account of Christ's passion and death offers us something else, something that may seem contradictory. It gives us reason to hope. And it is there in the words we just heard.

The detail is no coincidence. Saint John is giving us an echo of Eden - where man's journey on earth began, and where he fell from grace. But now, we have a

new Adam, Christ, who steps into the garden to face betrayal and suffering and judgment and death. With his Passion, Christ gave us a new Genesis. He offered us a new beginning, a new chance, a new way of going forward. Because of what happened this day, we can begin again.

Christ's last words in this gospel tell us: "It is finished." But what is finished? Christ's earthly life is finished. A long chapter in human history is finished. Our old way of living is finished. Humanity's wait for a savior is finished. And as much as we may want this gospel to have another ending, we realize that God's overwhelming love gave us something better.

We no longer see Jesus, and we were not there during His crucifixion. But yet, we are also saved. Why is this so? That is because in every Holy Mass, and including in today's service, even though there is no consecration today, the Lord becomes really present in our midst, through the Most Holy Eucharist.

When the priest consecrates the bread and wine brought forth to the Altar, he in fact, presents the same sacrifice as Calvary, lifting up both bread and wine, but no longer just mere bread and mere wine, but in substance and essence completely transformed into the Body and Blood of our Lord Himself.

Therefore, today as we celebrate the Passion and death of our Lord, let us all spend time in prayer and contemplation and reflect on how much we have caused pain and sorrow for our Lord, as He bore that cross, on His way to save all of us.

Standing near the cross of Jesus is a painful and a powerful place to be. As we pray this Good Friday, we are invited to stand there with Jesus and his disciples. Yet, let us also remember that, Good Friday does not stand by itself. Easter comes after Good Friday. And therefore, because we have shared in the death of our Lord, we also will share in His resurrection and receive eternal life.

Jesus, may your victory on the cross fill me with the courage to persevere in times of difficulty and the hope to see beyond the cross to the joy of the Resurrection.