

Way of cross unavoidable, opens hearts to the healing, redeeming love of Christ

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April 3, 2015

*Good Friday
Cathedral of St. Mary
Fargo, ND*

There is no other day like this day in the Church year. This is the only day in the liturgical year when Mass is not celebrated. The whole Christian world pauses this day to recall the death of Jesus. It is a somber day like no other, and St. Ambrose even called it “a day of bitterness.” And yet, we call this Good Friday. There are many places in Scripture and tradition that speak of the glory of the cross. But we speak of the glory of the cross not because we love suffering and death; rather because on the cross Jesus showed us the true glory of the Lord. God’s glory is his self-giving love, and it is a love that is stronger than sin and more powerful than death. On Good Friday, we see the glory and goodness of God in his own crucified Son, our Savior.

And how have we entered into this day? What is in our hearts as we hear the reading of the Passion of our Lord? What intentions do we bring to add to the universal intentions of this liturgy? What will be in our hearts as we reverence the cross on which Jesus died? And what will we say to him as we approach to receive him in Holy Communion? This day is a challenge to us, a challenge to truly enter into the mystery of our Lord’s suffering. How often we might have wanted to skip the cross and just go straight to the Resurrection. But the cross comes first, and we cannot bypass it. St. Teresa of Avila tells us that the only sure way to gain access to the divinity of Christ and to the glory of his Resurrection is through his sacred humanity. And St. Ignatius tells us that we must truly enter into the suffering of Jesus so that we might experience true sorrow for our sins.

So, on this Good Friday, we walk the way of the cross. Jesus took our human nature to himself so he might join himself to us. Let us now join ourselves to him and share, even in a small way, what he endured for us. Let us remain with him during his agony in the Garden. If we have ever experienced loneliness, abandonment, worry, let us join these to the sorrow that our Lord experienced at Gethsemane. Let us accompany him as he accepts the burden of carrying all the sins of the world on his own shoulders. “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Have mercy on us.”

If we have ever been mocked, ridiculed, or slandered, let us stand with him as he is jeered by the guards and the crowd. Let us stand with him as he is falsely accused and as he is condemned by Pilate even though he is innocent of wrongdoing. It was, after all, for our sins that Jesus was condemned. As the crowd shouts “Crucify him,” let us offer him our faith, our trust, our belief in his truth and his love for us. If we have been harmed or humiliated by others, let us stand with Jesus when he is beaten, scourged, and crowned with thorns. Isaiah tells us that by his stripes we are healed. And the crown of thorns he wears shows his true kingship, for it is a crown of love, a crown that reveals the fullness of God’s glory.

And as Jesus struggles to carry the cross, let us remember the times when we have needed the help of others. Remember also the times when others have needed help from us. Did we lend them our strength, our compassion, our understanding? Jesus struggled under the weight

of the cross, and his own disciples fled from him, but a stranger, Simon of Cyrene, helped him lift his burden. Do we lift the burdens of others as Jesus has lifted ours? Do we see the face of Christ in the poor, the sick, the elderly? Do we help Jesus in helping them? Jesus even fell under the weight of the cross, under the weight of our sins. But just as he got up and continued on, he helps us to get up, to seek his forgiveness, and to continue on the way of holiness. Finally, Jesus is nailed to the cross and lifted upon it. Others ran away from this tragedy, but a few stayed close: Mary, his mother, and John the beloved disciple, and Mary Magdalene. Do we stay close to him? Do we offer him our love? Do we console those who are sorrowing, those who have lost a loved one, those who suffer from illness? It is easy to flee, to avoid suffering, but Jesus accepted it, embraced it out of love for us. Do we do the same for him?

The way of the cross is unavoidable for the Christian, for the true follower of Jesus Christ. It is the way that Jesus chose to walk, and we must walk it with him. And of course, the reason he chose this way is simple: he suffered because of our sins. We sinned and were helpless to pay the price for our sin, so Jesus paid the price for us. But again, he didn't accept the cross because of any love for suffering or death. No, he accepted the cross because we needed him to, because it was the best way, the only way to communicate the gravity of sin and the unfathomable depth of God's love. From the cross, Jesus said, "I thirst." But this was not a physical thirst for water, it was a thirst for our love. He yearns for us, desires us for heaven more than we desire it ourselves, and he was willing to give everything to help us get there.

St. Ignatius was right in urging us to contemplate Christ's way of the cross, his suffering and death, with true sorrow and contrition for our sins. But the sorrow we feel this day is not the sorrow of hopelessness. It is rather a good sorrow, a sorrow that opens our hearts to the healing and redeeming love of Christ. This sorrow allows Jesus to reach into the deepest corners of our souls, the hidden recesses of our lives that still need his mercy, his redemption. Through this sorrow, as we accompany our Lord on the way, we open the door to forgiveness, and Jesus enters in. Just as blood and water poured forth from his side, he now pours out the torrent of his love and mercy on us, especially through his sacraments. And at last, when all is still, we hear Jesus say to us, "It is finished." He has accomplished what he came to do, and it is good.