

“We wait, and we hope.”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Good Friday
St. Mary's Cathedral

Millions of words have been written and spoken about this day, Good Friday, and about the event that defines it. In so many ways, it's an event that defies understanding, but in the end the death of Jesus upon the cross should bring home two important facts: first, the gravity of sin, but secondly and more importantly, the astonishing love of God for us sinners.

Our world is pretty blasé about sin. We see it all around us, we see it within us, and we become used to it. We even begin to tell ourselves, quietly, that this or that sin is no big deal. But sin is a big deal, and all we need to do to become convinced of that is to look at the cross. Jesus dying on the cross is an event of cosmic proportions because sin is an act of cosmic proportions. Sin deforms us, it deforms everything. It makes us less than God has created us to be, it makes us less happy, no matter what the culture might say. Sin is destructive, because it diminishes and even snuffs out the spark of divine life that is given to each one of us. Sin is a lie, because it tries to separate us from God, from the One who is life and love itself. No matter how tiny the sin, it always brings decay to whatever it touches, beginning with me.

But the flip side of this sad reality is a story of hope. No matter how deadly and destructive sin might be, it is powerless before the love of God. It is powerless before the power of the cross. It is impotent before the love of Jesus, who gives his life to defeat the power of sin. Sin and death are nothing but a dark mist before the life-giving breath of Jesus, which he exhales from the cross. He has died, but never has a death been so powerful, so victorious, and so healing.

Does Christ's death on the cross mean that God is some cruel taskmaster, that he demands a bloody sacrifice so that his anger will be appeased? Of course not! The crucifixion of Jesus was the opening up of God's divine heart so that we could see that no sin of ours could finally separate us from the love of God. Jesus suffering was the supreme act of love from our Triune God, the ultimate and visible manifestation of his passionate love for us, of his desire that we should be saved from sin and death. Millions of words have been written, but words fail us before the awesomeness of this love, the love that is God himself.

We might ask ourselves why God's plan unfolded in this way, why this all happened, and whether this was necessary. But as Blessed John Henry Newman once said of salvation history, “He knows what he is about.” He knew that only in this way could we in our human nature be saved. Only in this way could we understand what was at stake and our desperate need for forgiveness. Only in this way could we fully see the love he has for us. “He knows what he is about.” He walks his way of the cross to open for us the way to heaven, to accomplish for us what we could never have done for ourselves.

The paradox of the cross is that, the more closely we configure ourselves to Christ, the freer we become to be ourselves. The Crucified Christ took on the heavy burden of the cross in order to unburden others. He was nailed in place on the cross in order to set others free. He testified to the truth at the price of his own life, so that we could know the truth and come to believe that the truth really does set us free.

We call this day Good Friday, and we know what that means. Millions of words have been spoken and written, and at last we can only stand in awed silence before the magnitude of what happened on this day. It was a sad and dark day for the disciples of Jesus, but for us it is a good day, because we have been redeemed on this day by the blood of Jesus. It is a good day for us because we know that the story doesn't end with Calvary and the cross. We know that the death of our Lord is not final, that death cannot hold Jesus. We know that something incredible happens after Good Friday, something glorious, the victory of divine life. But for now, we must just wait and look and pray before the cross. For the

moment, we must let the events of Good Friday be what they are. By our presence, we console Jesus and we repent of the sin that brought him to this moment. And we allow his love and his forgiveness to absorb and forgive all the sins of our lives. And finally, we wait, and we hope.