

## **Homily for April 10, 2020 (John 18:1-19:42)**

Good Friday

Most preachers will tell you that it is easier to write a homily for Easter Sunday than for Good Friday. After forty days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, we are ready to embrace the joy of the Resurrection, and hear the good news of our salvation. Usually, it is much easier for us to embrace the story of the Resurrection than the pain, fear, and anguish of the Crucifixion. This year, though, it may actually be easier for us to embrace Good Friday than Easter.

It is difficult to find words in a time like this. The world we face today looks nothing like the world we knew on Ash Wednesday. We are isolated. We are alone. Normally, the churches would be full this week, as we gather as a community for these, the most solemn days of the liturgical year, but this year we are cut off from one another. When faced with a crisis, our usual urge is to come together to support one another, but one of the cruelest aspects of this crisis is that we must force ourselves to resist our instincts, because what we naturally would do is the single worst thing we could do in this particular case.

For the second time this week, we are hearing the story of Christ's passion and death. On Sunday, we heard Matthew's version of the Passion, including Jesus' cry of "Eli, Eli lema sabachthani," or "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is a cry of loneliness and despair, a cry of feeling utterly alone and abandoned. I think those words resonate with a lot of us today. We are alone. We are scared. We are cut off from our friends and loved ones, and from normality. We do not know where to go from here, and all of our usual guideposts have disappeared, as we wonder how long we will have to go on like this, and what life will look like on the other side.

Good Friday is the saddest day of the Church's year. And yet, there is great hope embedded in this day, because it is the turning point of the great story of salvation. Jesus appears to be alone and deserted when he is on the cross. His friends have abandoned him. The crowd has turned on him. He feels abandoned by God, but in some way he is never more connected to us than he is in that moment.

God became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The one, transcendent God, who is beyond our understanding and unlike us in every way imaginable, took on a human nature, and subjected himself to all the joys and sufferings, all the hopes and limitations of humanity. From the moment God became human, it was inevitable that someday he would die, just as all of us

do. That is an inescapable part of being human, and so when he was hanging on the cross he was engaged in one of the most human activities of all, one that we all will share some day.

While Matthew's passion speaks of Jesus' despair on the cross, John's Gospel, which we hear every year on Good Friday, reminds us that even in his last moments, Jesus was thinking of others. He addresses his mother and the Beloved Disciple, to entrust her to his care, and him to hers. He ensured that those he loved would be taken care of, and only when that was accomplished did he give up his life. While most of his disciples had deserted him, he remained connected to those closest to him, even if he could not reach out and touch them.

Jesus' suffering on the cross is a stumbling block for many non-Christians. They ask how someone so beloved of God could be allowed to suffer like that. Suffering can be a stumbling block for us, as well. We expect there to be some explanation for why we suffer. We want someone to tell us why this is happening, because we think if we can explain why it is happening, then we can make the suffering stop, but that is not part of our story. God never promised us that our lives would be free of suffering. He asked us to take up our crosses and follow him, without us really knowing where that journey would lead us. He did promise us, however, that he would be with us yesterday, today, and until the end of time.

Like Jesus, we may feel alone and abandoned, as we stay at home, and practice social distancing, but he is incredibly close to us in this moment. He has not abandoned us. He is suffering right alongside us, and feels our pain, and fear, and worry, just as acutely as we do. He knows what it is like to feel cut off from the world; he shares that in common with us.

We are joined to him by our feeling of being alone. This points out one of the great ironies of our situation: while we feel cut off and isolated from one another, we all actually share that in common. All of us are affected by this virus right now. All of us are going through the same experience, and are bonded by that experience.

We cannot gather together in one place, as we usually would. We cannot do the rituals of Holy Week the way we always have. But that does not mean we are alone. Wherever we are and wherever we go, we, the Church, are the Body of Christ. We are united in Christ, and, in that sense, we are together, because we are all with Christ, and he is with us. He will not abandon us, any more than his Father had abandoned him when he was on the cross. As painful as our suffering is in this moment, it draws us closer to him.

Every year, when we gather on Good Friday, it can be tempting to hold something of

ourselves back from entering fully into the experience, because we know that Easter happened. We know something that those on Calvary did not: that Jesus would rise from the dead after three days. Perhaps this year, we find it easier to enter into this experience, because we find ourselves in a situation similar to that of the disciples, because we do not know when or how this situation will end. It is hard to live like this, but we can have confidence that just as Jesus never abandoned those he loved, he will never abandon us, and he will be with us every step of the way.