

My brothers and sisters, today the church celebrates **Good Friday**. Our experience of this afternoon is heightened by everything around us that will make someone ask, what is good about a day that our Lord Jesus was innocently condemned to death and crucified? A day that we are not celebrating Holy Mass; a day we are asked to **abstain from all the goods of life**, a day there is a profound sense of loss and absence, in the church, right now there are no bells; no decorations... a day that everyone is expected to leave the church mournful and silent? The answer to these questions is that without Good Friday, perhaps, there would have been **no salvation for humanity**. This is because, had Christ not died, there would not have been the washing away of our sins (John 16, 3; Rom 5, 8). Hence, Good Friday is a blessing in disguise. It is actually on this day that **the devil was put to shame and the power of death was defeated**. Thus, Paul asked: "*death where is your victory, death where is your power?*" (I Cor.15: 55). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "... *Christ who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men*" (CCC 1992).

Again, it is on Good Friday that the journey of salvation is actually instituted. In fact, some scholars consider Good Friday more important than Easter Sunday. This is because **without Good Friday, Christ event of Easter Sunday would not have been possible**. The term Good Friday and the activities that surround it could be likened to one of the lines in the Exultet song during the Easter Vigil Mass which describes the fall of Adam and Eve as: "*Oh, what a happy fall.*" Thus, just as the fall of Adam and Eve helped in fulfilling the salvific plan of God, so also the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ on Good Friday helped in fulfilling the salvific plan of God. It is a day when the "drama script" written by God is fully "directed and acted out" by Christ his Son. On this day there appeared to be the *absence of God* by human reckoning. However, God was fully present and somewhere smiling because his son is accomplishing his mission for the salvation of humanity. *Indeed, it is a Good Friday!*

It is in St. John's account of the Passion of Jesus that we see, in stark relief, both **Jesus' humanity and his divinity**. We also get a very hard look at the human nature of the men Jesus chose to be His closest confidantes and the leaders of His Church. If we ever needed confirmation of human cowardice, all we have to do is look at one very central figure in the drama that was Jesus' suffering and death. We believe as a dogma of the faith that Jesus Christ was both **human and divine**. He knew who he was and he understood the purpose for which he had come. He alludes to that reality all through the Gospels, and most of the time, the Twelve don't seem to "get it," it was almost as though they didn't believe that all of this talk of suffering and death until the reality of what Jesus was telling them began to come to pass. Jesus knew they were weak, just as he knows that we, in our humanity, *are weak*. Jesus was ready to forgive all of them, just as he is ready to forgive all of us.

Then we have the ultimate example of moral relativism-Pontius Pilate. When he questions Jesus and asks him "**so you are a king...**" Jesus responds "**you say that I am a king**. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is committed to the truth hears my voice." (Jn. 18:37). Jesus makes clear that he has come to bear witness to the truth. He has already declared himself to be "**the Way, the Truth, and the Life**" (John 14:6) and now he tells Pilate that he has come into the world to testify to the truth-to bear witness to it. Jesus is clear that there is such a thing as truth, and he is a testimony to what this truth is. Pilate did perform one invaluable service, Jesus Christ was, and is, our Passover Lamb. The Passover Lamb that was sacrificed and eaten had to be inspected to insure that it was without fault, without blemish; otherwise the Lamb was not suitable for the Passover. Pilate inspected our Passover Lamb for us, and what did he say? "**I find no fault in Him.**" (Jn. 19:6) Just as they ate the Passover Lamb in the Old Covenant, so we are given the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world to eat in the New Covenant. Happy are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.

Unlike John, Luke affirms the fact that the **healing and forgiving** power of God were already at work in Jesus and Jesus' **innocent** before his death. At his arrest, Jesus **healed the ear** of one who came to seize him. During his trial, the antagonism that had existed between Herod and Pilate was put to rest. On the cross, Jesus forgave those who put him to death (**Father, forgive them, they know not what they do** Lk.23:34) and promised paradise to one of the criminals who died with him. Jesus understood his death as an atonement for sin was evidenced in his statement at the last supper, "This cup is the new covenant in my *blood, which will be shed for you*" (22:10). From the outset, Luke also established Jesus' death as an **innocent** martyr. Only in Luke's narrative does Pilate pronounce **Jesus innocent three times** (23:4, 14-16, 22). Notice that Luke departs from his Marcan source and changes the centurion's statement, "Clearly, this man was the

Son of God” (Mark 15:39) to “Surely, this was an *innocent* man” (Luke 23:47). Even one of the criminals crucified with Jesus attests his *innocence*, “we are only paying the price for what we’ve done, but this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41).

Finally, dear friends, Good Friday is a day of salvation; **a day Christ washed away our sins, and the day the devil was put to shame. This is the day the power of death was defeated.** Jesus was foretelling the salvation and grace we would receive through his passion and death. In fact, **all grace comes from the cross**, because Jesus was lifted up from the earth. Every time we receive the sacraments, their grace flows to us from Calvary. The Church sees the blood and water **as symbols of the sacraments** - especially the Eucharist and baptism - and that Christ gave us the sacraments from the cross. Let us do our best to avoid the sin of Judas who gave into despair; rather, let us always give Jesus a chance to forgive us and to restore us into the state of grace. Let us do our best to imitate Jesus who accepted death so that all might be saved. Let us try to die to sin, forgetting our own comfort in order to help those who need our love and service, so that we may have a share in his glorious resurrection. Amen!