

Friday of the Passion of the Lord
April 15, 2022
Gospel of John 18:1 - 19:42
Fr. John

Listening to the scripture readings of Good Friday, especially the Passion according to the gospel of John, one would be hard pressed to describe it as a success story.

Looking at the state of the world today, one might view it in a similar manner: wave after wave of a pandemic that never seems to go away; war in Ukraine; violence and injustice seemingly rampant everywhere - and not to mention a late snow storm that dampens the spirits of all who are looking forward to some Spring weather.

Certainly a spirit of darkness and cynicism seems to be winning over a hope for a better world.

All of that might be true if we only look at life on a surface basis. It's like looking at a picture up too close and only seeing a part of it. We need to step back and view it in its entirety. We need to see the bigger picture. That's what the Passion narrative of John's gospel does for us. It was written near the end of the first century after the Christian community had at least two generations to more fully comprehend the significance of the Jesus event - or more precisely that of the risen Christ - for it was that of the **risen Christ** that is the big picture.

John's gospel, even more than that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is laden with images that speak of Christ in its universality. It begins with a prologue that speaks of the Logos - the Word that existed before all time and will be so even after time ceases to be. Jesus, of course, is that Logos, that Word. Even though in his human body he is subjected to every kind of humiliation and violence, he is still the very one who is in charge over all those who think they are in power and have control. That's a perspective that we need to hear on Good Friday.

Yes, we see Jesus in all of his human limitations, bearing his cross as we all must. We witness not just his physical torments but also the emotional ones that come from the betrayal and desertion by his friends and perhaps most of all, the indifference of the crowds who may see him as just another criminal going to his execution.

Good Friday however, invites us to step back and view our lives in the context of the kind of power which Christ exhibited. It's not the power of violence, subjugation, and revenge. We've been trying that for thousands of years and look where it has brought us! Even the Church has dipped into that philosophy from time to time. Hopefully, when we have done that, like Peter we can repent of those sins with the help of God's grace.

Our work is Christ's work, bringing the Good News of God's unconditional love to all people in everything we do. We are not here to present some kind of religious sales pitch which claims that we have the best doctrines, the most refined philosophies or other arguments to win everyone over to our side. It reminds me of the vacuum cleaner salesman who comes to demonstrate his product by first spreading dirt all over your carpet. We are not here to condemn the world and preach how dirty it is but to realize

how it can be the world which the Creator originally desired it to be. How we can become the human beings that Jesus modeled so perfectly well.

The key is to do it in the way that Christ Jesus did it. Not denying the cross but rather embracing it to the point where it no longer becomes an instrument of humiliation, suffering and death but is transformed into a sign of ultimate victory.

All during the season of Lent, Fr. Brad and I, in our homilies, have been using the 12 steps of recovery in the AA program as a model of a conversion process. These are not easy steps. Like the Way of the Cross we stumble and fall. We regress and wonder if we are making any progress at all in our journey. We can become disillusioned and even doubt if God is walking with us. It's been my experience, however, that only people who have suffered in some way can be instrumental in saving one another. Only those who have suffered the same pain and managed to survive can form that bond which leads to healing. That is why sponsors for those in recovery from alcohol or drug addiction are recoverers themselves; fellow survivors of Indigenous residential schools need to be the main helping hands for those still greatly affected and traumatised by that experience. Whatever the addiction, or trauma deep communion and compassion are formed much more by shared pain than by shared pleasure. Perhaps it's because the empathy shown is genuine, authentic and based on a common experience. The God Who suffers with us, as described in our first reading, is the one Who helps carry our crosses. It's rather interesting to note that in other versions of the passion, Jesus is helped to carry the cross by one, Simon of Cyrene. But both are carrying the **same** cross - and doing it together.

Christ indeed gives us the bigger picture to ponder. It's one that the community that gave us John's Gospel presents us with today - that the Christ is infinity larger than any of the obstacles that we encounter and because He lives so we too shall live. He doesn't ask us to undergo anything that He himself hasn't also under gone. He walks with us and invites us to do the same with one another.

Today, as we ponder the meaning of the cross, we reflect on that very first step and have made that decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understand Him. In doing this we will reflect the words of Our Lord in the cross, 'Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit'.