

April 2, 2021, Good Friday
Gospel of John 18:1 – 19:42
Fr. Brad

In one of Ron Rolheiser's Good Friday reflections, he makes a few observations about our human state and the challenge that the suffering and death of Jesus presents to the rest of humanity.

He points out that, it is one thing to maintain your principles and ideals when they are shared by other people, it's another when it seems you are the only one holding up that ideal.

Its one thing to keep your balance when life is fair; it's another thing when things are unfair and you are unjustly criticized and *everyone around you* seems to have lost their balance.

Its one thing to bless others when they desire to receive that blessing but quite another when they do not want it but rather loathe your very presence.

It is one thing to forgive when the wound you have incurred is not that serious and affects you minimally, when the hurt is 'merely a flesh wound.' Its another to forgive someone when it isn't fair, when the hurt you received has dramatic and life changing or life *taking* effects....when the life taken is your own.....when the blow is a mortal wound.

As we reflect on the readings of Good Friday and the events at the end of Jesus' life, we see clearly the moral loneliness that Jesus faces. It seems everyone including his friends have either turned against him or abandoned Him except for his mother and a few of the women followers...and young John.

By this point, Jesus had said and done all he had come into the world to do and there was nothing more to say. He remained silent as the verbal and physical abuse and lynch mentality intensified. He held to his ideals in the face of an increasingly hostile response to him. He remained gracious, forgiving, without losing his balance or his message. His actions remained completely consistent with the way he lived and with what he always taught. He always spoke of doing nothing on his own but did the will of the one who sent him, His Father. Though his body was ravaged this day, his heart remained with the people - - with each one of us. It was not for His sake but for ours that all these things were permitted to happen.

Each day of our lives, we face this test in many areas of our lives. We might ask ourselves, 'what are the ways we have been hurt by others and how have we been responding to them in our hearts'.

How might we have been hurting others by our own stubbornness in thinking.

How well are we able to stay with our moral principles and ideals even when faced with the resistance or even the wrath of others. Are we open-minded and open-hearted to accept input or correction from others and admit we might be wrong or misinformed on an issue. Or do we dig our heels in because we are afraid to be wrong. There are many that needed correction that day on the road to Calvary and through out Jesus' ministry.

In the reading from Isaiah, we hear of the servant who turned the world's image of Kingship upside down. *a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

We accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded by our transgressions. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

For us to see Jesus in this way, leads us down a path that reveals the depth of God's love for us.

If you look up the word 'scapegoat' in the dictionary, it says, 'a person or group made to bear the blame for others or to suffer in their place.'

The whole concept is a symptom of our broken human state. We know more about right and wrong than we are equipped to manage it effectively. We all fall short. Our tiny limited human brains can only handle so much. Our ability to communicate with each other effectively is chronically hampered by biases and misinterpretations. We can build amazing physical structures like skyscrapers, bridges, space ships but we can't understand each other and get along together as human beings.

When our focus is outside of ourselves on inanimate projects, we human beings can do great things. But when it comes to matters of the heart and getting along with each other, we are still far too vulnerable to self interest and the abuse of power and hurting one another out of stubbornness and fear when our own world view is threatened.

We may have a sense of the ideal, but we are ill equipped to give the ideal response. Our pride, our fears and irrational thinking still get in the way.

Jesus bore the brunt of these human inadequacies. The world as a whole it seems was not ready for his ideal and perfect response of love. He became a scapegoat for we human beings who have not yet learned how to deal with our limitations honestly and admit our need for help.

It takes a thought, prayer, and openness and wisdom from above in order to offer the most loving response. But we human beings short circuit that far too often and then we need a scapegoat to blame our failed responses and weaknesses on because we have forgotten to seek God first and to accept the grace and mercy of God along the way.

Jesus prayed and pondered in order to provide a wholesome and loving response. He speaks to us today with the message of pausing, not reacting in fear. Are we pondering and truly asking for the guidance of the Father? And are we willing to hear the answer, even if it is difficult to hear? He shows us the right disposition of heart and the loving and moral response as human beings to the challenges of this world.

On this Good Friday, may we come to recognize more deeply that the entire relation of human beings to God is to receive love and give back love, no matter what the cost. May each of us continue to ponder His response on this day and integrate it more fully into our everyday lives. And may the hope given us in the resurrection we will celebrate soon, inspire us to persevere. Amen.