

GOOD FRIDAY YEAR A: THE PASSION OF THE LORD 2020

Dear Friends, in St John's proclamation of *The Passion of Jesus*, it is Jesus himself who enters into *the heart of human suffering*. All that the worldly powers can offer, whether it is Caiaphas - the High Priest, his guards, or Pilate and his cohorts; are *imprisonment, torture and death*. Even St Peter fails to evade the pattern, drawing his sword to cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Jesus however, brings *another vision* and unfolds it in the center of this picture of conflict and despair. Isaiah notes: "**He does not crush the bruised reed, he does not protest, but rather, allows himself to be handed over.**"

Jesus offers himself so that this *New Vision* may indeed *be 'accomplished'*. As a *'living sign'* of this new vision, this *new order*, Jesus — from the Cross - gives his mother Mary; and the Disciple - the one Jesus called *The 'Beloved'*; - to one another. In their *new life shared*, they offer each other *a new love, a new spirit*, for which Jesus so thirsts.



At the Wedding Feast at Cana, Mary asked Jesus for wine, and he replied: that *'His hour had not yet come'*. Now, mingled with water, in this — *'His Hour'*, Jesus pours out the wine of His life's blood as soldiers pierce his side - so that all who come to believe in him, may in turn, *be nourished by His love* and bear *its 'fruit'* - in the love we show to one another as Jesus' disciples today.

In John's Gospel, Jesus has no need of help: there is no *Simon of Cyrene* to assist him with The Carrying of The Cross. He takes up *His Own Cross* and trudges onward to Calvary, which is *the scene* of His fulfilling *his mission* and of his revealing God - to the World. His last words are not a cry of reproach, accusing God of abandoning him, but rather - a shout of triumph; "**It is accomplished.**" Earlier he had explained to His Disciples that The Good Shepherd is the one who lays down His Life for His sheep: he acted this out when he washed the feet of the Disciples, including Judas. John tells us that Jesus did this out of love: "**now he showed how perfect his love was**". We can understand this whenever we contemplate and reflect upon Jesus *on The Cross*.

As we gather, on this *'Good'* Friday, there are no more words from The Cross. The miracle worker from Galilee is silenced; his parables are heard no more. The Table is *empty*, the bread *consumed*, the wine *drained*. With Mary his mother, and with *the beloved disciple*, we too, *'remember'* His Cross, and *'await the Resurrected Spirit'* of Jesus *to touch our lives afresh*. Like Mary, and John - *The Beloved*, we too, *dare to follow him along The Way*, where we are invited to walk amidst our own *'Way of the Cross'*; and yet, - understandably for us and for our present—day World - none of us particularly, want to freely do so!

Friends, in these days of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the *Passion of Christ* touches and changes us! Often, many among us are weighed down with the challenges and worries in life. So many at this time internationally are experiencing daily - great stress caused by illness or the death of a loved one; or perhaps some other anxiety or personal hardship. We are anxious and gravely concerned for our children or parents, for the International Economy, for our families, friends and work colleagues — in short - we may be fearful about the sufferings of those we love so deeply. In reality, dear friends, few of us don't have some burden or other, so the idea of walking in step with Christ and of following in his footsteps may not seem particularly appealing to anyone of us just now, - because we all carry *our own crosses* through life.

Jesus' mission was to reveal God's love for humanity and he invites us into *a relationship with God* which is perhaps best described as *a friendship*. Throughout John's version of the Gospel story we are given examples of people coming to believe in Jesus, growing in their appreciation of who he is, and what he means to them. Today, we are invited to consider how *The Cross* is more about *love* than it is about *justice*. No one can love more than *to lay down their life for their friend*.

As His Disciple, we each are called today to become *Christ—bearers* in the midst of our fragile and broken world, entrusted with Christ's *new vision* which frees our heart *to love!* For it was not Christ's suffering that saved our world, but rather, *Christ's love* - a love with which he bore and offered *his sufferings* to God For Us!

Today, on this so termed — ‘Good’ Friday, we enter into *the darkness* which surrounds us with *a message of Light, and of Hope*. Every pain that Jesus endured was endured For Us! Everything he suffered during His Passion was a fulfilment of Isaiah’s words: **“He borne our infirmities and carries our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.”** (Isaiah 53:4)

Friends, as we follow Jesus along *the ‘way of the Cross’* today, we ought to remember that He is following us, along ours! Whenever we are in the midst of hardship, we can call upon *the power of the cross*. In the life and person of *Saint Mary of The Cross MacKillop* for example, we possess a mentor and guide. Mary’s Sainthood, - *her holiness of life*, exists not in some supernatural power but, in Mary’s fidelity to Christ’s Call to stand beneath *the shadow of His Cross*, and to embrace it in *our daily living!* If then, we can, *especially in these most challenging and difficult days* - hold secure in our belief that *a new vision, a new life*, can be seen beyond The Cross - to *The Resurrection* - then; - Jesus’ Cross can bring us *Joy*, bring us *Peace*, and even bring us *Healing*, as we entrust our lives, our problems, into His care.

The Crucified Christ opened His arms on Calvary, and still calls to us: **“Come to me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest”**. Words that find *an echo* in the stark realizations of the vast number of COVID-19 related deaths associated with the destruction caused by the virus. There is nothing we can face in Life’s Pilgrimage that Jesus hasn’t faced already, for he accompanies us not only in our mountaintop experiences but in *the valleys* as well. He makes us stronger than we presently are, if we but come before him in our human weakness and reach for Christ’s eternal love and mercy.

The challenge of this Good Friday is clear! *Life* can follow *death*; *Joy* can follow on *failure!* That which was *broken* can be *Restored!* To believe this however, we, like Mary MacKillop and all The Saints - must have Faith in *The Cross of Christ*. Today, in a unique way we see The Cross as it stands in the midst of the World — and its shadow falls across the International Family of Humanity. As its shadow presently touches so many of us, we are still called to embrace it in ‘*An Act of Veneration*’. Might we then, be able to see *The Cross* with *fresh-eyes*, for even though it is a hard olive wood, it is also, *a fertile tree* - that brings New Life! Furthermore, and most of all, it is *The Revelation* of an extraordinary divine love. As we *revere* The Cross this day, - we give thanks that Jesus is present to us again - as The One who indeed *redeems the World*; and this day, before all other days - we make our own the *Faith Proclamation* which we declare so frequently: **Lord, by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free. You are the Saviour of the World!**

— Fr Graeme Malone SSS — Roman Catholic Chaplain CRGH

