

Sermon for Good Friday 2016

I think Good Friday means many things to different people.

Some find it a time of sorrow and stay away from church because it is just too sad or it reminds them of some loss in their lives.

Some find it the very time that they would like to be in church for a sense of companionship. Being present for them is to share something of Jesus and their own pain.

Some find it easier not to think about it too much, and head straight for happier times on Easter Sunday.

Good Friday means different things to different people.

I believe we find however a more objective meaning of Good Friday

when we listen to words that Jesus spoke in the garden to those who had come to arrest him.

During the kerfuffle, one of his supporters produced a sword and cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest which Jesus then healed.

Jesus then addressed the crowd: *Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?*

*When I was with you day after day, you did not lay hands on me.*

*But this is your hour when darkness reigns.*

“The hour that darkness reigns”.

Can we imagine it?

For this to be true, it seems that God - Love - has stepped aside and let the players in the grand drama of the crucifixion be given their head, like horses racing towards the finish line.

And it is true - for when we see how this drama unfolds we see just that.

All the players seem to be controlled by their darkness, that is, their fear, their pretension, projection, self-importance, self-righteousness, and cowardice.

When we look at the detail the drama of the crucifixion we notice that it is divided into two parts: the trial, then the crucifixion itself.

The scenario is complicated, reflecting the tangled political scene in the Jerusalem of the day.

Jesus is brought first before the Jewish high priest, he is then passed on to Pontius Pilate the Roman procurator, then to Herod Antipas the Jewish king (Roman backed),

then back to Pilate who finally gives in to the crowd's demand that Jesus be crucified.

This sequence of events uncover the full force of darkness.

As each of the various characters in this drama surfaces and resurfaces,  
we see that force gaining momentum.

On and on it gallops towards to the cross.

The self-righteousness of the religious leaders.

The “hypocrites” the “vipers brood” the whitewashed tombs;

“which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.”

The fear that belongs to Pilate who sells out for the sake of expediency,  
to restore superficial peace and quiet and hang on to his own position and power.

Judas and Peter, two of his own are part of it.

Their darkness comes to the fore in their betrayal and denial.

Judas ’betrayal actually delivers the authorities to him.

Peter’s denial states that Jesus is going it alone – For it is just too dangerous to be associated with Jesus anymore.

But we look again at this drama of the crucifixion *when the hour of darkness reigned*

and we see that Love has not stepped aside at all – it is present and is standing right in the middle of it.

Love is actually the object of the drama. It is the reason for the crucifixion.

So in the reign of darkness, Love is sent to the cross after floggings and ridicule and torture  
and so he goes, but not on his own.

He takes with him the darkness that has sent him

because he has embraced it with his willingness to suffer and hang on the cross.

He wraps his arms around it and takes it on himself fully and into death.

The darkness of the world has been transformed by perfect Love – after such an embrace it couldn’t remain the same. It is finished.

Humanity and God are reconciled.

His whole life's work was meant for this point.

It was in the Passion, says Saint John of the Cross, that Christ 'finished that supreme work which His whole life, its miracles and works of power, had not accomplished: the union and reconciliation of human nature with the life of God.'

Here we learn all that it means to acknowledge Him as our Way, our Truth and our Life.

I suppose no soul with any sensitivity can live through Holy Week without an awed and grateful sense of being incorporated in a mystery of such amazing self-giving love.

The verse from an anonymous writer captures the essence of the crucifixion of Christ:

*In stillness nailed.*

*To hold all time, all change, all circumstance in, and to love's embrace.*

The Lord be with you.

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