

Good Friday 2023  
Meditation - Father Craig Looney  
Saint Joseph Parish  
"The Divine Reversal"



Good Friday...the culmination of the Divine Reversal that began with the birth of Jesus. In the words of the hymn we sang at the beginning of the Liturgy...we are here today to witness the completion of God's own sacrifice of his own dear Son.

Why did the Father allow this to happen? Was there no other way for Him to accomplish the redemption of mankind? Did Jesus have to be put to death like a common criminal? Jesus gives us the answer the question...

*...For God loved the world so much he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior. (John 3.16-17)*

Good Friday is the ultimate act of God's love for us...this is the day on which the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve get reversed. This is the day the broken relationship we once had with God has been restored. We again have fellowship with him through Jesus.

The history of mankind is one of Divine Reversal. Both Judaism and Christianity believe in a God who is actively involved in the lives of the people he loves. We heard last week from the prophecy of Jeremiah how the people rejected God's love. They wanted a human king. They wanted to be just like everyone else. But God never rejected his people. He gave them kings and prophets and priests to guide them...some did a better job than others.

God first established a covenant with his people, a covenant sealed in the blood of circumcision. God's people would worship him, and he would take care of them. We often understand the words contract and covenant to have the same meaning. They are different. If two parties enter into a contract and one party breaks the contract...the other party doesn't have to fulfill his side of the contract. If two parties enter into a covenant and one party breaks the covenant...the other party must still honor his side of the covenant.

God established the Temple Priesthood to make certain worship was done correctly. The covenant relationship the people had with God called for the shedding of blood. The sacrifices that took place in the Temple were intended to forgive sins, but their effect wasn't permanent...they had to be repeated over and over again.

Under the Old Covenant...the Temple sacrifices were done according to God's plan. But the Letter to the Hebrews tells us the offerings and animal sacrifices had turned into a show, a performance, with rigid rules. The rules became more important than praising God or the desire to reinforce one's relationship with him. God himself would now act to restore the people's fellowship with him.

The Old Covenant and the Temple sacrifices were supposed to instill hope in people's hearts. Forgiveness and hope are what the writer of Hebrews is talking about when we read...

*..."The Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things...only a faint outline of the good things to come...the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins. Because Jesus did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all."*

Human history is all about mankind turning away from God. In the General Confession at Morning Prayer...we acknowledge we have done things we shouldn't have done...and we have failed to do those things we should have done. We often don't keep our part of the deal...but God always kept his part of the deal. He is always ready to forgive...but we must first admit we need his forgiveness.

Through his sacrifice on the cross...Jesus did what no Temple sacrifice or any other sacrifice could do. He made certain our sins were forgiven, once and for all, for everyone, everywhere, and at all times. The New Covenant we have with God assures us that even when we make mistakes and sin...we can always come back to him and receive his forgiveness.

Two thousand years ago on a hill outside of Jerusalem, an event took place that would forever change mankind's relationship to God. A New Covenant was made...a New Covenant that was also sealed in blood...the blood of Jesus Christ...the blood of God

himself. This was, according to Hebrews, a greater and more perfect sacrifice, not made by human hands, but made by God himself.

This brings us directly to the foot of the cross. We join Mary and the other women, and John, the only disciple of Jesus who had the courage to be with Jesus to the end. There is a large crowd watching the drama unfold...some laugh at Jesus...for them this is a source of amusement. We don't laugh...there is nothing funny about the Crucifixion of Jesus. Perhaps some of us are moved to tears...that's OK...it means we are beginning to understand the scope of what we are witnessing...why Jesus allowed himself to be executed like a common criminal.

In his meditation for Good Friday, entitled *The Final Battle*, Lutheran Pastor Larry Neeb (1939-2019) writes...

*...He was not the first or the last innocent person who would be crucified by the Romans...but he was different from any of the others. He uttered no protest, no cursing of his abusers, only a prayer of forgiveness for those who were now in charge and those who watched. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.24).*

*This was a turning point in world history...a reversal of the trend of evil repaying evil, an act so powerful in its significance that, remembering it, there would be those who would follow in every age, asking the strength to forgive instead of retaliate.*

*The first word that our Lord uttered from the cross was his last prayer, and it rose to heaven burdened as no other prayer, heavy with all the sins of the world. The fear and loneliness of all who had gone before and all who would come after, rose with that prayer to the heart of the Father.*

*At the top of that lonely hill that Friday were focused the sins of all time upon the sinless Son of God...all the rebellion of human beings and the self-giving love of God...a Father whose heart was so large that it could embrace all of the sins of the world and still have room for forgiveness.*

*Good Friday is the story of God's wrath against sin and God's love for the sinner, and it is called Good Friday because God's love won! \*\*\**

When Jesus took his final breath he said, "It is finished". His work here on earth is done. The curtains that separated the Holy of Holies

in the Temple from the place where ordinary people worshipped were torn in two. God made his presence known to the entire world in a dramatic way. He showed himself and his love for us through Jesus. The secrecy of the Holy of Holies and the High Priests who served there were done away with. Jesus, the Great High Priest, made God available to everyone.

The Holy of Holies represents God's throne in heaven...the Church is the earthly representation of heaven...our direct Incarnational experience of what the writer of Hebrews says we hope to see for ourselves one day. By his death on the Cross, Jesus brought down the barriers man set up that kept him from fully experiencing God's love. By his death on the cross, Jesus has guaranteed we don't have to fear our own death. By his death on the cross, Jesus has made possible for us everlasting life in heaven, life with him, in the presence of God the Father forever. We will see God face to face with our own eyes, and we will rejoice in his presence.

We began our Lenten journey to the cross on Ash Wednesday. The ashes placed on our foreheads were in the shape of the cross. They reminded us of our own mortality...but they also reminded us death is not extinction. The ashes are a symbol of hope.

Good Friday...the culmination of the Divine Reversal...the completion of God's own sacrifice of his own dear Son, Jesus...and in the Divine Reversal...we experience God's supreme act of love...and the promise of eternal life...

*...For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Cor. 15.20).*

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\*\*\* *The Road Back to God, Devotions for Lent* by Larry Neeb, c 2021 Creative Communications for the Parish, Fenton MO 63026