

Good Friday 2025

Homily – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

“Walking with Mary...from Nazareth to the Cross” ()*



“Do whatever he tells you” (John 2.5)...are the last words of Mary, the Blessed Mother, recorded in the Bible. She did not say these words at the foot of the cross on the first Good Friday. She said these words to the waiters at the Wedding in Cana, at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

Dr. Edward Sri is a nationally known Roman Catholic author, and a professor of theology and scripture at Augustine Institute in Denver, Colorado. In his book *“Walking with Mary: A Biblical Journey from Nazareth to the Cross”*, he has this to say about Mary’s last words...

...“And they are like a last will and testament to all of us who wish to follow Christ. Through these words, Mary exhorts us to trust Jesus completely just as she abandoned herself to God’s plan step-by-step throughout her life as a humble servant of the Lord.”

In *“Walking with Mary”*, Dr. Sri looks at the scriptural passages in the Bible that talk about the Blessed Mother’s faith and devotion...even in the darkest hour for her and for all of humankind. Our Good Friday Meditation this year will focus on several events in Mary’s life. We will learn from her how to have the same faith and devotion to Jesus she had...how to apply that faith and devotion to our daily lives.

Mary’s role as the *Theotokos*...the “God-bearer”...cannot be overstated. God put his plan for the Redemption of humankind into action by send the Archangel Gabriel to he with a startling message:

...“Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you. Mary was troubled by the angel’s message and she wondered what it meant.” (Luke 1.28-29).

It is not surprising Mary was troubled by Gabriel’s message. She was a virgin and asked Gabriel how this was possible. She did not doubt Gabriel’s message...she was asking for him to clarify the meaning. Sometimes we have to ask God to clarify what he wants us to do in our lives. Gabriel’s response was intended to calm Mary’s fears:

...“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.” (Luke 1.30)

In our Lenten Sunday Discussion Group we have been exploring the covenants God made with his people...he “found favor” with them and went about cementing covenants with them. Mary was keenly aware of the special covenant relationship she had with God. She knew Gabriel’s message required a response. And so Mary said:

...“I am the Lord’s servant; may it happen to me as you have said.” (Luke 1.38)

Mary had an idea the task of being the *Theotokos*...the “God-bearer” would be a difficult one. Dr. Sri points out when the Lord comes our way and asks us to take on a difficult task or to give something up...we have a choice to make. We can turn our backs on God and walk away...or we can follow Mary’s example and “*Do whatever he tells us!*”

Mary faced many challenges during Jesus’ life on Earth. Jesus was born in a barn, a strange place for the Messiah...Christ our Lord...to be born. His birth went virtually unnoticed. Shepherds came to the barn after angels told them the Good News...the Savior has been born in Bethlehem. Wise men from far way countries came to worship him, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Dr. Sri reminds us Mary may not have been aware of what all these things meant, but she “kept them close to her heart”. Everything Mary did was a matter of the heart. Our walk with Mary this Good Friday must also be a matter of the heart.

After the birth of Jesus, the Bible records only three episodes from his childhood: his Circumcision when he was seven days old; his Presentation in the Temple when he was forty days old; and when Mary and Joseph found him teaching in the Temple when he was twelve years old. Mary’s suffering and ours begins with the Presentation in the Temple.

Mary and Joseph followed the Law and brought Jesus to the Temple when he was forty days old. They offered Jesus to God and “bought him back” with two small birds. A “righteous and devout man” named Simeon had received a revelation from the Holy Spirit...he would not die before he saw the Messiah.

Simeon took Jesus in his arms and blessing God said the prayer we now call the Nunc dimittis:

...“Lord, not let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for mine eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” (Luke 2.29.32)

Simeon had more news to give Mary, words she must have found disturbing, words she would remember thirty years later:

...“This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. (Luke 2.34-35)

This brings us to the Cross, and why we are here today. It is unlikely any of us here today will be arrested, put on trial, and sentence to death for our faith in Jesus Christ. But there are many who have paid the ultimate price for being witnesses for Christ to the World.

Let's remember Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio, the 14-year old Mexican boy who was the subject of our 2019 Good Friday Mediation. Jose lived at a time the atheist Mexican government declared war on Christianity. He refused to renounce Christ as his King and Savior. He was executed on February 28, 1928, with a bullet to the back of his head...on the orders of his own godfather.

During the Second World War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran Pastor and author of the book “Cost of Discipleship”, paid the price of a martyr for being a disciple of Christ and for his criticism of Hitler's Nazi regime was hung by the Gestapo.

We can find no humor in Good Friday. There is nothing remotely funny about the execution of Jesus as a State criminal. The Roman Government had many forms of executing enemies of the State. Crucifixion was one of the more brutal forms, intended to cause as much pain and suffering and public humiliation as possible.

And so we join Mary and the others on the *Via Dolorosa*...the Way of Sorrows...that will lead us to the Cross. Jesus experienced suffering beyond anything we can imagine. Mary experienced her own suffering as she watched her son...the Son of God...being tortured and killed. We suffer with Jesus in the only way we can...by being here today...to

meditate on the meaning of Good Friday...to remember Jesus' selfless sacrifice of love was for us.

After his conviction and sentenced was pronounced, Jesus was stripped naked and whipped with a leather strap imbedded with metal spikes or sharpened pieces of bone. Mary watched...we watch ...as Jesus' skin is torn open...over and over again. The Gospels tell us people laughed at Jesus. Soldiers put a purple robe on him...the sign of royalty. This was no robe of honor...it was a robe of humiliation. They called him "King of the Jews"...Jesus our "good and gracious King" of Palm Sunday is being marched to his death.

Luke tells us Jesus' journey...*Via Dolorosa*...*Way of Sorrows*...was made all the more difficult by the whipping he received from the soldiers. The weight of the Cross caused Jesus to fall. The Scriptures do not say how many times Jesus fell...tradition says three times. The soldiers forced an African man, Simon of Cyrene, to help Jesus carry his cross. Jesus, the Son of God, went through this for us. Mary watched. We watch.

If we look at the crucifix at the High Altar...we see a sanitized version of the Crucifixion. Jesus was nailed to the Cross totally naked. This was the ultimate act of humiliation for a Jew to be seen naked in public. His execution site was on a hill outside Jerusalem...for everyone to see as they came and went through the City Gate. A statement was being made...this could happen to anyone...man or woman...for any of a number of crimes against the State.

We stand with Mary at the cross. Dr. Sri tells us John's Gospel is the only Biblical account of Mary's presence at the Cross and mentions her by name. The Synoptic Gospels only mention there were women looking on from a distance. John records her saying nothing...only "standing by the cross of Jesus." What must have been thinking? She must have remembered Simeon's prophetic words, "*and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.*" But Mary never ran away. She stood by Jesus in the darkest hour in human history.

When we look at Jesus on the cross...our hearts (our souls) get pierced. We don't like what we are witnessing. Will we run away, or will we stand by Jesus as he has asked us to do:

...“If you love me, you will obey my commandments. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever.” (John 14.15-16)

...“My commandment is this: love on another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friend is to give his life for them.” (John 15.12-13)

Jesus hung from the Cross for three hours. The footrest was intended to help him push up so he wouldn't suffocate. The soldiers wanted to break his legs to hasten death. But Jesus was already dead. There was not need to break his legs...to make the Scriptures come true:

...“Not one of his bones will be broken. (Exodus 12.26; Number 9.12; Psalm 34.20)

Crucifixions could go on for hours. Jesus died quickly. All his suffering has ended...a relief for him and for his mother...a relief for us.

What have we learned from Mary on our Good Friday journey to the Cross? We learn from her what it means to be a disciple of Christ in all circumstances and at all times. We learn to trust God completely and without hesitation as she did. Dr. Sri quotes Mother Teresa of Calcutta:

...“At the foot of the cross, Our Lady saw only pain and suffering---and when they closed the tomb, she could not even see the Body of Jesus. But it was then that our Lady's faith, her loving trust and total surrender were greatest.”

Good Friday is our invitation from Jesus to take up our crosses...whatever they are...during this lifetime...with the assurance that his death on the cross is for us the way to everlasting life in heaven. That's why we call today Good Friday. Without Good Friday...there can be no Easter.

We have the Blessed Mother's words to help us remember:

“Do whatever he tells you!”



(*) *“Walking with Mary: A Biblical Journey from Nazareth to the Cross”*
© 2013, 2017 by Edward Sri, published by Image, an imprint of Crown Publishing Company, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York NY.