

Good Friday, 2011

I want to thank each of you for being here this evening. These three nights of the Triduum ... each is so very different, each in its own different way is so beautiful, and each in its own beautiful way speaks to powerfully to the heart of our faith, that I regret that any Christian misses any of it.

Tonight we are gathered to hear once again the sacred Story of Jesus love and sacrifice for us, to lovingly honor this sacred symbol of His love and sacrifice, and then to share our Holy Communion as ONE BODY in His Body, to strengthen us so that we in turn may go on to offer our lives for others as he did, even if it involves giving our own lives.

I believe that one of the most important questions of our faith journey is posed here in this story. One of the most important functions of some of our devotions – the Stations of the Cross, the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary – is to bring us to face this suffering and death of Jesus. Some of our most ancient and evocative Christian art portrays this, forces us to face this directly. And it is not only Jesus' suffering we face, it is also all the senseless suffering that the innocents of the world endure. This past week I read a beautiful reflection piece written by Bishop Kicanas of Tucson for Good Friday. He spoke about the Good Friday experience that Tucson went through this January 8th, when a madman gunned down 19 people in 16 seconds, critically wounding a US Representative and killing six, including a federal judge of deep faith and a little girl of 9 years. He compared the heartache of his community with the heartache felt by Mary, Jesus' mother, by Mary Magdalene, by John at the foot of the cross, as they watched the most innocent of all men suffer. These all help us understand the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

WHY? indeed.

I cannot answer why all the innocents of the world suffer. I know that we all will die one day, and that is our human condition. But I do not know why my life should be so lucky: well-fed, when so many subsistence farmers depend on the right rainfall in order to eat at all; healthy, when 3rd world children die from diarrhea because of the lack of clean drinking water; or sleeping in a warm bed under a secure roof, when so many are homeless on our own Seattle streets. I cannot answer the questions of why all the innocent suffer, but I can say that in each of the cases I just mentioned, those innocent surely suffer because of the collective sin of the world. We do **not** really live in solidarity with our own brothers and sisters who suffer hunger or die from preventable causes, or have no safe place to lay their heads at night. There is enough food in the world, enough wealth; but too little will. There are plenty of homes for the homeless in Seattle, but we're all too afraid to share our own homes with them.

Sin causes much suffering. It's obvious to see sin as a cause of suffering when people deliberately hurt others, like a madman on the loose or when someone is brutalized, because it's personal; but it's also obvious that sin is a cause of suffering even when it's not personal, but collective. This is sin too. This is also Good Friday. ***And if you don't believe that, you can't really understand why Jesus died on the cross 2000 years ago.*** Jesus gave his life serving the poor, the lowly, the outcast, and inviting us to join him in service. His life of service, his confrontations with the powerful, & His witness to the Truth led to the cross. Jesus had foretold his suffering and death, and He went to Jerusalem deliberately. And he had no regrets, not even on the cross.

John's gospel story is the one we listen to every Good Friday. It is different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke -- John is trying to tell us something that the others didn't.

The three synoptic writers all present the awful sufferings of Jesus, and the reactions of the crowd, and details that John doesn't mention, such as the account of the Agony in the Garden, or of Jesus crying out in desperation on the cross. Of all the gospel writers, John was the only eye-witness of the Passion. And he presents for us a Jesus who died horribly; but more so than any of the others, John tells us of the *great dignity and calm* of Jesus in spite of it.

It begins in the garden, with his arrest, when there is no mention of a betraying kiss, but we see a Jesus who steps forward to the mob to ask whom they're looking for, and when he tells them I AM, they step back and fall to the ground. We see this dignity in His interrogation by the high priest, and when he calmly confronts the guard, saying "If I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" It continues in his conversation with Pilate, when Jesus speaks forthrightly of his mission: to testify to the truth, that everyone who belongs to the truth listens to his voice. Pilate does not want to deal with Jesus, who is clearly no ordinary prisoner, and though Pilate eventually gives him up to the crowd, his wrangling with the crowd is far more detailed and prolonged than in all the other accounts...because Pilate is afraid.

And it continues at the cross. Only in John do we see Jesus' tenderness and concern for his mother, who is right at the foot of the cross at the end. And finally, when Jesus dies, it is not with a cry or a shout, but with the words, "It is finished." John does not even say that Jesus dies...rather, Jesus bows his head, and gives up his Spirit.

Bishop Kicanas said more about this in his Good Friday reflection. He spoke about a 12th century sculpture of the Crucified Christ, in the Cathedral of St. Augustine in Tucson. He said of this sculpture, "Whenever I look at His face, captured by the artist in the first moment after His death, I see His response to violence, suffering, and death. I see His response to our sinfulness."

I tell you, I had a hard time tracking it down, but I finally found images of that sculpture. Like our own central cross, it is a large wooden crucifix, though the one in Phoenix is far more emotive, and displays not only the suffering Jesus went through, but a face full of expression. As the bishop puts it, "On His face there is no twisted grimace of suffering. Instead, there is love, there is peace, and strange as it might sound, there is contentment. His is the face of someone who had no regrets."

Jesus' crucifixion on the cross, as horrible as it was, was Jesus' gift to us. ***By this cross***, Jesus shows us the great depths of his love. ***By this cross***, he show us that it is possible to live a life for others, to live God's truth and carry that life to its fulfillment, even if it upsets and provokes the powerful. ***By this cross***, he shows us that we can face our own crosses with calm and trust. ***By this cross***, we can find hope and strength, when our suffering or the sufferings around us seem too much to bear.

"This is the Wood of the Cross, on which hung the Savior of the world. Come, let us worship."
[Leads immediately to Veneration of the Cross]

Deacon Denny Duffell, April 22, 2011