

Good Friday

Last night I told you that each day of the Triduum would have a four word homily. “Go and wash feet” was last night’s message. Today’s liturgy focusses the cross. The Cross reminds the world of the sacrificial love of Christ which he expressed to all through his passion and death. “As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ,” says St. Paul. In addition, the Apostle says, “the message about Christ’s death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for those who are being saved it is God’s power”. Paul addressed this message to the Jews who see the cross as a burden for criminals and suffering as punishment for sinners. Therefore, they think it is out of place to believe in someone who is crucified. On the other hand, the Greeks who were renowned thinkers and philosophers of the time saw the cross as a sign of foolishness. In all their knowledge they could not understand how God uses ‘foolish things’ to express his greatness.

St Theodore the Studite, one of the early Monks of the Eastern Church, sees a trace of the cross in the following Biblical events of the Old Testament: First, on the pile of wood on which Abraham placed his Son Isaac; second, on the wood of the ark in which Noah, his family and all animal species were saved. Furthermore, he sees the foreshadowing of the cross in the wooden staff of Moses, which changed water into blood, devoured the false snakes of the magician and divided the red sea for the salvation of the Israelites. Again, he sees an allusion of the cross in the staff of Aaron that blossomed on a single day and showed him to be the true priest.

The cross has a message for all believers today as it gives meaning to the trials and troubles in the world, and for standing as a symbol of love as well as a symbol of victory. The second chapter of the book of Sirach admonishes those who wish to serve the Lord to be prepared for temptations. Trials are an inevitable path towards the attainment of salvation and victory. Jesus emphasized this fact clearly to his followers when he says, “If anyone wants to come with me, they must forget themselves, carry their cross and follow me”.

The cross brings to memory the sacrificial love of the one who hangs there. That leads to today’s four word homily: “This is for you.” The cross is clear proof of Jesus’ love, that he laid down his life for us, and challenges us to do the same for our brothers and sisters. That is why we: “Go, and wash feet”, as I said last night.

The early Fathers of the Church interpret the four cardinal points of the cross as symbols of the love of Christ. According to them, the vertical points signify the height and depth of his love, the horizontal points expressing the width and breadth of that love. Their interpretation is closely connected to Paul’s words that prayed for the Ephesians to have the strength to grasp the breadth, length, height and depth of his love.

The message of the cross is a paradox because it seems to contradict itself, but in the contradiction itself is found an inherent truth, that of death bringing forth new life. Every farmer who plants seeds that grow into crops understands this. The seed must die to bring new life.

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Good Friday is a day to pause and think of the meaning of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. The cross has a place in Christianity just as the incarnation and resurrection are important landmarks in God's plan for our salvation. The hope of resurrection gives meaning to the passion and death, which we commemorate today. The cross then becomes a symbol of hope and love, which blares out the message of Jesus saying: "This is for you."