

Good Friday Homily 2007

April 6, 2007

“Grant O Lord that thy Word only may be spoken and thy Word only received, + In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

During this Lent the prayer from the Ninth Station of the Cross has haunted me. Today it has finally made sense. It prays: “that an instrument of shameful death (the Cross) has become for us a means of life and peace”.

I. Anyone who has lived any length of time knows the truth of the old adage ‘Life is hard’. In his book “The Road Less Traveled” Scott M. Peck writes that it is HOW we face this reality that will make the difference between a life of peace and a life of despair. Good Friday is the supreme Christian example of accepting ‘Life is hard’ and yet overcoming despair.

Life was hard for clergy of all denominations after Communism took over the Eastern Block Countries in the late 1940’s. Ministers became the lowest paid of all professions. The Communists hoped it would drive the clergy into poverty and poverty would drive them into despair, thus causing the collapse of Christianity. But most clergy remained faithful, willing to accept their lot, offer up the suffering that poverty caused for the greater good of the survival of the Christian Faith and Church. It did survive and lived to see the fall of Communism.

II. Today our culture is very much into Pleasure: that is self-indulgence. In our country we say we have an inalienable right to pursue happiness. But is that what our forbearers meant by Happiness: worldly self-indulgent pleasures?

If we think that's what it means, as many do, then we will never find happiness, not true, everlasting happiness. Good Friday is a reminder that life involves suffering; no one escapes some type of sufferings. In Christ Jesus even God suffered! It is in HOW we embrace it, HOW we face our suffering that will determine our happiness or lack thereof. In Scripture the Bible does not point to pleasures as true happiness. Rather it shows us happiness is marked by contentment from a faith that God is with us in all things. He is standing next to us and we must stand on His promises as the old Hymn says.

III. There are many kinds or types of sufferings. We see in Jesus' Passion a physical suffering- one far greater than most of us will ever know or have to undergo. But Jesus also bears the suffering and pain of being abandon. Judas, St.Peter and many of the disciples left him, fled or hid. His pain was so great that from the cross He says:
"My God, My God, why hast thou abandoned me?"
So how did Jesus face such physical and mental suffering?

Isaiah the prophet calls Jesus a Suffering Servant. There's the important word: Servant. St. Paul tells us Jesus emptied himself, meaning He gave himself for others. We saw that acted out last night on Holy Thursday in the Mandatum, the washing of feet. That's what servants do. Jesus faced and endured the suffering by being a servant. That is HOW He showed us that happiness is not about self-pleasure. A servant is faithful, reliant, dependable and trusts in his master. That is exactly what Jesus did on the cross for us.

VI. We will only find such true happiness out of all life's hardships when we rely on God, having a faith that knows God is with us, even in our pain and sorrow, in all things. Is that not what St. Paul means when he tells us in his Epistles "to give thanks to God in ALL THINGS"? Life is Hard, that's the given. We face and endure the hard parts as Jesus did- with Faith, faith in God's Will, with Trust, trust that somehow this will all serve God's purposes, even that death on a Cross. Jesus' suffering, His Passion and Death saves us...and it teaches us HOW to live, HOW to endure with Faith, with God by our side.

Indeed only when one faces pain and sorrow in life do we and can we grow from it. It may even turn out to be a gift! A Gift as strange and mysterious as the Cross itself !

“That an instrument of shameful death should become for us a way of life and peace.”

+ *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*