

Good Friday

Introduction...

Today we are in the midst of the most sacred of seasons...
the very heart of the Jesus' story... the Cross of Christ.
Why did Jesus have to be crucified?
Is our God so vengeful that God's own Son had to suffer?
Jesus came to bring us God's way...
To heal a broken humanity,
and to show us God's dream for us...
to live a fully human life.
Christ's mission was to preach and teach and heal.
How does the Cross fit into that?
Why the Cross?

I Why The Cross?

The Cross of Jesus, I believe, shows us the ugliness of sin.
Our Sacred Stories passed down in the Old Testament tell us about a sinful
humanity, from the stories about Adam and Eve, Cain and Able and Noah,
through the denunciations of the Prophets for the sinful faithlessness of
God's own Chosen People.
Sin still abounds in our world.
Read today's newspaper.
Evil and darkness still shadow the light.
Envy still poisons people's hearts.
Greed stirs desires more and more stuff.
Anger and resentment breed violent thoughts and emotions that often
express themselves in violent words and even behavior.
Arrogance belittles others who don't measure up to my expectations.
Lust is a two billion dollar a year industry infecting the relationships of both
men and women.
Laziness and Gluttony weaken our health and steal precious time for service
of others.
For too many people "life all about me".
Do we even recognize our sinfulness?

"Sin" is an unacceptable word in polite company.
Today we no longer talk about sin?
Sin has become a meaningless word.
Right and wrong have become very slippery.

We have become gods unto ourselves,
calling our own shots,
rationalizing and giving ourselves excuses –
not even realizing how we hurt each other,
or worse... not caring.
It's not adultery, it's fooling around.
It's not porn, it's relaxing a bit and rewarding myself.

Over 70 % of Americans say they believe in God.
But what is their God like?
One theologian describes the God of too many Americans with this image:
*God is like an Irish setter... nice and cuddly, convenient to have around, who
barks at what scares us – but who makes no demands on us.*

Does our God make demands on us?
What about the Ten Commandments?
Commandments, not suggestions.

II Jesus' Passion

Sin is the reason for the Cross of Jesus.
Jesus foretells his own Passion...
"When you have lifted up the Son of Man..."
Christ on the Cross shows us the ugliness of hatred and resentment, the
viciousness of torturing and condemning an innocent man, the cruelty of
scapegoating.
Christ on the Cross shows us the depth of his love for us and his gift of
forgiveness to us...
for Jesus shed his innocent blood for all of us in the darkness of our
sinfulness.
Here's what the first Scripture Reading for Good Friday says:
*Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured...
... He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the
chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. (Is 52-
53)*

II A Story

How else might we tell this story of Jesus' Passion?
This is a true story.

A little boy's sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance of recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked.

Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister."

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room. Mary, pale and thin... Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned.

As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube.

With the ordeal almost over, Johnny's voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence.

"Doctor, when will I die?"

Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he agreed to donate his blood. He thought giving his blood to his sister would mean giving up his life. In that brief moment he had made a great decision.

*(from **Stories for the Heart**, compiled by Alice Gray, pp. 131ff.)*

Jesus, our innocent Brother, gave up his blood for us – and he did die, to save us from the disease of sin...

My brothers and sisters, our sins put Jesus on that Cross.

We hung him on that tree...

The innocent one.

The peaceful one.

The loving one.

The compassionate one.

Jesus took sins onto that tree with him...

The envy,

the anger and rage,

the resentments,

the hatred and revenge,

the cowardice and self-centeredness and self will run riot.

Only Jesus could bridge the gulf our sins cause between us and the all holy God who created us to be people of love and compassion and care...

Only Jesus could bridge the chasm between our sinful humanity and our loving Creator,

because Jesus was both human and divine.

Jesus took our place on the Cross...

to save us from our sinfulness...
that's why the Cross.
We couldn't bridge the chasm, but Jesus did.

Jesus, you hung upon that Cross for us.
You love us and forgive us our sinfulness.

IV Prayer

We turn to you now Lord and repent of our sins, even of our hidden sins,
any sins that haunt us and shame us, any sins that we find it so hard to give
up..

Jesus, you are the innocent one who bears the burden of our sinfulness as
you carry your heavy Cross up to Calvary.

Let us pray the Lord's healing mercy upon us:

Our response to each phrase is: *Have mercy on us.*

Jesus, prostrate upon the ground in Gethsemane, have mercy on us

Jesus, betrayed by Judas with a kiss, have mercy on us

*Jesus, bound by soldiers and brought before the Sanhedrin, have mercy on
us*

Jesus, condemned by a cowardly Pilate, have mercy on us

Jesus, cruelly scourged, spat upon and mocked, have mercy on us

*Jesus, led through the streets of Jerusalem carrying the burden of the Cross,
have mercy on us*

*Jesus, stripped of your garments and insulted by the mocking onlookers,
have mercy on us*

Jesus, fastened to that Cross with nails, have mercy on us

Jesus, obedient even to death for love of us, have mercy on us

*Jesus, pierced by a lance, shedding your blood even after your death, have
mercy on us*

Let us pray

Jesus, we kneel here before you this day.

We remember your love for us poured out on that Cross.

Jesus, forgive us our sins.

Jesus, help us to be grateful for your love and forgiveness, and never take
them for granted.

Jesus, we love you and we thank you... our brother, our shepherd, our king.
Amen

