

Good Friday 2014

The cross brings us face to face with Jesus' suffering. He was alone - all his disciples had deserted him except for his mother and three women along with John, the beloved disciple. And his death was agonizing and humiliating. Normally a crucified man could last for several days on a cross. Jesus' had already been scourged, beaten with rods, and a crown of thorns pressed into his skull. It is no wonder that he died mid-afternoon. Pilate publicly heralded Jesus "The King of the Jews" as he died upon the cross, no doubt to irritate and annoy the chief priests and Pharisees.

Jesus was crucified for his claim to be King. The Jews had understood that the Messiah would come as their king to establish God's reign for them. They wanted a king who would free them from tyranny and foreign domination. Many had high hopes that Jesus would be the Messianic king. Little did they understand what kind of kingship Jesus claimed to have. Jesus came to conquer hearts and souls for an imperishable kingdom, rather than to conquer perishable lands and entitlements.

We can find no greater proof of God's love for us than the willing sacrifice of his Son on the cross. Jesus' parting words, "It is finished!" express triumph rather than defeat. Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit knowing that the strife was now over and the battle was won. Even on the cross Jesus knew the joy of victory. What the Father sent him into the world to do has now been accomplished. Christ offered himself without blemish to God and he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (see Hebrews 9:24-26).

St. Augustine of Hippo (430-543 A.D) comments on those who stood at the cross of Jesus:

"As they were looking on, so we too gaze on his wounds as he hangs. We see his blood as he dies. We see the price offered by the redeemer; touch the scars of his resurrection. He bows his head, as if to kiss you. His heart is made bare open, as it were, in love to you. His arms are extended that he may embrace you. His whole body is displayed for your redemption. Ponder how great these things are. Let all this be rightly weighed in your mind: as he was once fixed to the cross in every part of his body for you, so he may now be fixed in every part of your soul." (GMI 248)

In the cross of Christ we see the triumph of Jesus over his enemies - sin, Satan, and death. Christian writers down through the centuries have sung the praises of the Cross of Christ. Paul the Apostle exclaimed, "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

Rupert of Deutz (1075-1129), a Benedictine theologian and abbot, wrote:

"The cross of Christ is the door to heaven, the key to paradise, the downfall of the devil, the uplifting of mankind, the consolation of our imprisonment, the prize for our freedom."

The Cross of Christ is the safeguard of our faith, the assurance of our hope, and the throne of love. It is also the sign of God's mercy and the proof of forgiveness. By his cross Jesus Christ has pardoned us and set us free from the tyranny of sin. He paid the price for us when he made atonement for our sins. The way to peace, joy, and righteousness in the kingdom of God and the way to victory over sin and corruption, fear and defeat, despair and death is through the cross of Jesus Christ. Do you follow the Lord Jesus in his way of the cross with joy, hope, and confidence?

I offer one last thought for us all to consider on this most holy of days. Our Lord's paschal mystery of his suffering, death, and resurrection made redemption and salvation available to each and every human being on the planet. BUT, do not be deceived as so many in this modern age have been deceived. While salvation is available to all, not all have received it, embraced it, or live their lives in accord with it. We must open our hearts, minds, and souls to God's offer each and every day of our lives and cooperate with His grace. Salvation is **not** a given, it requires the assent of our free will and the living out of Jesus commands to us every day of our lives. We must echo the words of St. Paul in our daily lives: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Our individual salvation is only worked out in a lifetime of striving to conform our lives to that of Christ Himself. This for most of us will take fighting that good fight until our last breath.

I pray: Lord Jesus Christ, by your death on the cross you have won pardon for us and freedom from the tyranny of sin and death. May we never give up striving daily to make your redemptive suffering and death a reality for each and every one of us. Amen.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella