

Homily for Good Friday 2018

A little girl I know was five years old when she was taken to Mass for the first time. As she sat with her parents she quietly began to sob. Eventually, she ran out of the church crying. Of course, her parents followed and asked her why she was crying. Why was that man hanging on that cross she sobbed? With centuries of devotion we certainly have domesticated the crucifix. It is a familiar part of our ritual. All its gory reality is so very familiar that we hardly notice how graphic it is. Nor does it bring a real sense of what it meant for those who loved him to see such a person treated so violently.

Crucifixion was reserved by the Romans for those who opposed Roman rule. It was therefore used very often. The bodies of the executed were left to rot and the birds which eventually stripped the bones clean. The executions took place outside the cities as a warning to anyone who dared question the rule of Caesar. It is significant then that Jesus followers who remained with him took care to get permission to take Jesus body down and bury it. He had made a deep impression on many people who recognised his goodness.

The difference for us is that we look at it, and all Jesus life, from the vantage point of the Resurrection. We have come to recognise that the tree of Jesus' defeat has become the tree of his victory over death. The crucifix, like death, has no fear for us now. "O death where is your victory where is your sting!" (1 Cor 15:55). The crucifix has become a metaphor for all the pain and suffering which comes our way. As for Christ so also for us. But the victory does not take away the suffering. He still asks us to follow him all the way. We follow with confidence in God's grace which is sufficient for us and participate in the mystery of his dying and rising.

The cross comes our way in many different disguises. For example, we can get stressed. And we can react badly. So people irritate us, we project our own negative feelings onto others and the world seems darker. When life gets us down we may call our selves by many different names. I am stupid or foolish. Or I am fat or skinny. I am strong or I am weak. I am angry or sad. We have a whole litany of names we recite over and over again. We come to identify with those names. They shape our minds and keep us blind to who we are.

However, that is not you. None of it is you. However many times you say it to yourself that name is not you. None of them is your name. Your name is John or Mary, Bill or June. The challenge is that we have to put on a new mind: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Do you ever say your name? I am John, Mary, Bill or June? I bet not! We hear other people say it sometimes in anger sometimes in love. They are the names we are known and given by our parents and by God affirmed in Baptism. Who are we then? Only God knows us as we truly are. Who we are fully as St Paul said is a mystery we are still coming to know, "for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). That is our mystery that we enter and discover more and more throughout our life as we accept the call of Christ.

We call today Good Friday because Christ showed us the way to shed those false names and that false identity. To do so can be very painful but it means a resurrection. It is a necessary dying so we might have life.

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