

Good Friday Homily

It happened in Auschwitz, Poland in 1941. Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest was captured and put in the infamous death camp for helping Jews escape Nazi terrorism. Several months went by and in desperation, one of his fellow inmates escaped from the camp. The camp rule was enforced. Ten people would be picked up randomly and then thrown into a tiny cell where they would die of starvation and a final exposure to lethal gas, as a teaching lesson against future escape attempts. Names were called. When the military officer called the name of a Polish Jew Frandishek Gasovnachek, he cried, "Please spare me, I have a wife and children!" The Franciscan priest Kolbe stepped forward and said, "I will take his place." Kolbe was marched into the starvation cell with nine others where he managed to live for almost 5 months and then died. This story was later reported on NBC news special several years ago. Gasovnachek, by this time 82 years old. He said "Kolbe did not have to do this; but he did. That was kindness, compassion, mercy, going out of the way". As he was telling this story tears were streaming down his cheeks. Around his little white house there was a marble monument carefully decorated with flowers. The inscription read: IN MEMORY OF MAXIMILIAN KOLBE HE DIED IN MY PLACE. Since 1941, every single day Gasovnachek lived with the knowledge, "I live today because someone died for me." Every year on August 14 he travels to Auschwitz in memory of Kolbe. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Dear friends, for the last 2000 years billions and billions of Christians lived their lives with the knowledge, "I live because Jesus died for me." And today, on this Good Friday millions and millions of Christians throughout the world gathering in

the churches before the crucified Christ praying: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you ...because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world. According to the ancient tradition of the Church, Good Friday is the only day of the year when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not celebrated. The celebration of the Eucharist is suspended on all the altars in every Catholic Church throughout the world as we mourn and grieve the Passion and Death of the Lord.

It seems quiet strange to call the day on which the Savior of mankind was crucified a "good" day. Why is Good Friday good? [Good Friday is called good](#) because Jesus Chris the son of the most loving God, by His Death, "showed us in action, how much he loves mankind. Good Friday is good because:

It is today Jesus paid the price and purchased our salvation as a free gift.

It is today we are redeemed

It is today we are forgiven

It is today we are reconciled

It is today we are healed

It is today we are born again

It is today the powers of evil and sin are conquered

And it is today we are once again recreated and became children of God

The third century Church father Theodoret said it right. "The crucifixion is a new and strange method of healing. The doctor suffered the cost, and the sick received the healing." I will never forget this in my life. When I was in the seminary during my 4 years of theology, I had a spiritual father. He was one of the holiest men I ever met. Once a Month I used to go to him for spiritual direction and every 15 days I would go to him for confession. One time, at the end of the confession he said, today I am not giving you a penance; but I am going to do it. After the night prayers this evening, I am going to do a stations of the cross for you. If you want to

join me, you can, but you don't have to. He knew that I was struggling with something. That evening, we did the stations together and believe it or not that struggle went away from my life forever! That's what Jesus did on Calvary; a strange way of healing for humanity.

On Good Friday, on the mount Calvary Jesus was not only showing us **how much He loves us**, but He was also **teaching us how to love!** I remember the story of Mathew and Mary. They had been dating for almost three years. They were deeply in love, and they seemed to be made for each other with a bright future. Mathew had decided to propose to Mary. But he wanted to do it in most meaningful way for Mary. Since Mary was a very good devotee of Mother Mary, she always wanted to go to **Medugorje**. So Mathew decided to take her to **Medugorje** and do the proposal there. As Mathew was busy planning the pilgrimage to **Medugorje**, one day suddenly Mary passed out at work and was taken to the emergency. Their worst fear came true. Mary had a big tumor in brain. And the doctor gave her less than year to live. Mathew was devastated. His dream of a long, happy married life with Mary, raising a family together was destroyed. It looked like she would not even live long enough for him to propose in May, like he planned. What was the point now?

The next morning he went to the church, spent some time before the crucifix and prayed about it. Then he went into the parish office and talked to the priest. And he went to the hospital to Mary, his fiancé determined. He revealed to Mary his plan of proposing her in **Medugorje** and getting married next year. Taking her hands and looking at her eyes he said to her "So marry me now! Understanding the special situation, the priest had offered to marry them the next week. Mary's tears turned into tears of joy as she embraced Mathew and said, "Yes!"

That is love! It is self-giving, it is self-forgetting, and it is self-sacrificing. That is the kind of love that Jesus demonstrates on the cross and that is the kind of love He is demanding of His disciples. Jesus said ‘I give you a new commandment; love one another- just as I have loved you’.

Today during this celebration, let’s thank Jesus for His love, and let’s ask Him for strength to follow His example of self-giving, self-forgetting, and self-sacrificing love. The martyr wears a cross because it is where he gets his strength. What about a prostitute- she wears it because it is an ornament: The cross alone defines what is finally right, true, and eternal. Once again, Good Friday presses us with the overwhelming question: are you willing to take up the cross and count yourself among those the world calls wackos? Of the crucified Nazarene – are you a follower or a fan?

There were three crosses on Golgotha. On the right and on the left were two robbers crucified for rebellion and murder. On one cross Jesus died for our sin; on another cross the unrepentant thief died in sin, and on the third cross a repentant thief died to sin. On the center cross (with its mocking title of scorn, Jesus the Nazarene king of the Jews, in three languages) hung a sinless Sufferer! He was dying for the sins of the world. The greatest tragedy of our time is that, too many people are living in sin and dying in sin. May that never happen to us! Looking at the crucified Christ, let’s ask for help in our weakness praying “save us, Savior of the world, because by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free!!!