

Fr Tom's Homily - Holy Thursday 2020

Does your love waver when you encounter bitter disappointments and injury from others? As Jesus' hour of humiliation draws near, he reveals to his disciples the supreme humility which shaped the love he had for them. He bends to perform a lowly task reserved for slaves - the washing of smelly, dirty feet. In stooping to serve his disciples Jesus knew he would be betrayed by one of them and that the rest would abandon him through fear and disloyalty.

Such knowledge could have easily led to bitterness or hatred. We have experienced from the daily readings leading up to the Holy Week, Jesus frequently met the injury of betrayal and disloyalty with the greatest humility and supreme love. Jesus loved his disciples to the very end, even when they failed him and forsake him.

The Lord loves each of us freely and unconditionally. His love has power to set us free to love and serve others with Christ-like compassion and humility. Paul the Apostle tells us that Christ's gift of love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (Romans 5:5 and 8:35-39). Does the love of Christ rule in your heart, thoughts, intentions and actions? How have we responded when we have been mocked? Do we still love the person who betrayed us? Do we still carry the same love Christ gifted to us?

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) in his sermon for Holy Thursday wrote: "He had the power of laying down his life; we, by contrast cannot choose the length of our lives, and we die even if it is against our will. Christ, by dying, destroyed death in himself; we are freed from death only in his death.

His body did not see corruption; our body will see corruption and only then be clothed through him in incorruption at the end of the world. He needed no help from us in saving us; but for us, without him we can do nothing. NOTHING. He gave himself to us as the vine to the branches; apart from him we cannot have life.

Finally, even if a person die for the fellow human being, it may not demonstrate forgiveness. On the other hand, Christ brought forgiveness to us through dying on the Cross. In this he gave us a reason for rejoicing. Let us then love one another as Christ also loved us and gave himself up for us." Let us bow our heads and pray: "Lord Jesus, your love conquers all and never fails. Help me to love others freely, with heart-felt compassion, kindness and goodness. Where there is injury, may I sow peace rather than strife.

Fr Tom's Homily - Good Friday 2020

Before you commence to read this homily, I would like to request that you put a crucifix and a stone in front of you. The crucifix is Jesus who is always with you and the stone symbolises the burden that you are currently carrying. Jesus is inviting you now, "If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. Take the yolk I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30). Now let us pray and reflect upon the homily.

Who can bear to look upon the bloodied cross where Jesus hung without shame or sorrowful grief, disbelief or reverent awe? The cross brings us face to face with Jesus' suffering. Just think about it - 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. 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 (John 19:19). 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.

Jesus' death on the cross defeated sin and death for us. 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.

As we gaze on his wounds - we touch the scars of his resurrection. While the close company of Jesus' disciples - his apostles - had deserted him and hid out of fear from the Jewish authorities, Jesus' mother and some of the women who were close to Jesus stood close to him while he hung upon the cross.

Can you just stop for one moment, close your eyes, ponder upon visually as Mary stood by her Son on the cross?

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D) in his sermon on John's passion account focuses on the gaze of the women who witnessed the shedding of his blood and the offering of his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. "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.

Pope Francis expressed his words of wisdom in saying, "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.

St Augustine invites us to present ourselves before Jesus crucified who took our sins upon himself and nailed them to the cross. Through the eyes of faith, we, too, gaze upon the bloodied body of our Redeemer who paid the price for our sins - and we touch the scars of his resurrection who defeated death for our sake so that we may know the victory of his cross and resurrection.

In the cross of Christ, we see the triumph of Jesus over his enemies - sin, Satan, and death. Many Christians 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 abbot and theologian, 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.

Do you follow the Lord Jesus in his way of the cross with joy, hope, and confidence? Let us bow our heads in prayer: "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 I live in the joy and freedom of your victory over sin and death." And now, please pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be... Eternal rest grant them O Lord and let your perpetual light shine upon them, may they rest in peace of Christ. Amen.

Fr Tom's Homily - The Solemnity of the Resurrection of the Lord, Easter 2020: Happiness in Hope

The unfortunate restrictions prevent us from assembling as one family to celebrate Easter in St Michael's. But we still proclaim our joy in the renewal of the world, our Easter joy. Many are suffering from the corona virus, and we keep them all in our prayers. But no one is suffering from the loss of our Easter joy. No pandemic can destroy Easter. The celebration of Easter stands in stark contrast to our commemoration of Good Friday. Think about the Good Fridays you have experienced. On Good Friday, there are no flowers or alleluias. Only solemn music.

And there was the Cross. Yet, both Good Friday and Easter, as well as Holy Thursday, are bound together into one celebration, the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. The name "paschal" refers to the lamb who was sacrificed and whose sacrifice brought life. God is the Lord of Life, but mankind decided that he did not need God. His choice of sin was a choice of death. Without God, without a spiritual life, mankind's existence was limited to the here and now. There was no hereafter for him. No eternity. Life ended, and that was that. But, to use a biblical term, in the fullness of time, that means when God saw fit, the Eternal Word of God came as the new Adam and Eve, the one who would choose life. Through a paradox beyond our understanding, Jesus' death was a means for restoring life to his brothers and sisters, to you and me. Jesus rose from the dead and became the source of spiritual life to all who believe in Him. This is why we call out "Alleluia." Hence, we are no more dead. We are alive in the Lord.

The sign of our acceptance of the Life of the Lord is our baptism, or, more importantly, the daily living of our baptismal commitment. But how about those who have never been baptized? What happened to the Jews, like Martin Buber, or the spiritual Hindu or Buddhist, like Mahatma Gandhi or the Dalai Lama? Do they have no future after death? We prayed for them in the ancient petitions of Good Friday. Why did we pray for them?

If they have no spiritual life, then they are dead. However, they are not dead. Our faith teaches us that Jesus descended to the dead. He called forth from death those who desired to do what was right and good, people of goodwill who by choosing to be moral were therefore choosing to have union with God no matter what concept of God they had. Theologians call it Baptism of Desire. Every Good Friday, I always marvel at the people who come up to venerate the cross. I am blessed to know so many of our parishioners' personal spiritual stories.

I see you come forward expressing a deep faith that the Lord will care for them and their loved ones, a deep trust that all will be well even if the future is uncertain. They represent all the people who are in pain right now, all those who are suffering. They represent those who are fighting cancer and other serious illnesses.

I also think about and pray for those whose marriages or families have unfortunately fallen apart, the single parents or orphans. All of these come up to venerate the cross. All Christians have found happiness in their hope. St. Augustine loved that phrase, happiness in hope.

He used it several times in his greatest work, *The City of God*. He used it to describe the Christian attitude in life. It is true that we have to do everything possible to bring peace and justice to the world. We cannot turn our backs on people who are suffering; Foreigners, Australians, migrants or our indigenous brothers and sisters. Easter is the celebration of hope. It is our hope in Christ that helps us endure challenges like the corona virus. We need to grasp on to our faith with both hands, be the main steering wheel in our lives, not a spare tyre. Only our faith brings sanity, meaning, and purpose to our lives. The corona virus has brought sickness and death, turmoil, unemployment, and all sorts of other crises into our lives, but our faith gets us through because despite the suffering we have happiness in hope.

No one can take the Risen Saviour from us. No one and no situation, no matter how terrible, can take His Presence from us. This is the Gift of Easter Sunday! We have entered the spiritual journey of discovery. May our spiritual lives have an infinite precedence over our physical lives. May the life of the Risen Lord flow through our veins, so that every thought word and deed of our lives may shout out: Jesus Lives! And may we all be happy in the hope of eternal life. Alleluia! The Lord is Risen, Alleluia! Have a Happy and Blessed Easter.