

Good Friday
Year B
March 20, 2018

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Gospel: John: 18:1-19:42

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In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Amen.

He caused the lame to walk and the blind to see. He unstopped the ears of the deaf and healed the fainting soul. He cast out many demons and cured many who were sick, He even raised the dead and yet we crucified Him. Whether we read the account of the Passion from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, all the Gospels agree on this point and all the Gospels agree that on that cross, the Lord of Life, the Prince of Peace, the Messiah, died in excruciating agony. When we read the Passion accounts of Jesus from our Gospels, we have the option to break the Passion into parts. We break the Gospel into three parts today, the Narrator, Jesus and the Reader. The Reader takes on many different voices, including the crowd. The crowd does not speak all that often but when they do, it is always chilling and always in the same vein, as they call for Jesus' crucifixion "crucify, crucify Him." Those words are so awful, so violent, so vehement and so definite. The crowd is described as the people, those gathered for the ensuing spectacle, that spectacle being an execution, which began with a trial, followed by a conviction and then a brutal walk to a place called Golgotha where the hideous execution takes place. The crowd thirsts for blood, for pain. for agony as they shout crucify, crucify Him, and they are appeased. The crowd is the people, the crowd is us,

and these words today, “crucify, crucify Him,” are the words spoken by humanity. Today they are our words. I say many times in my sermons when I speak of the crucifixion as I did just a moment ago, that we crucified Jesus, because this was humanity’s doing and we are part of humanity and therefore we have a share in humanity’s crime, putting the Son of God to death on a cross.

The word Passion, means agony, and there were many different instances of agony for Jesus through the whole of the Passion narrative. There are the beatings, the mocking and ridicule, the walk to Golgotha, the crucifixion itself, just to name a few. Once Jesus’ is arrested in John’s Passion account, the disciples disappear from the scene with the exception of two of them, one of them being Simon Peter. Peter is often considered to be the first among equals when it comes to the disciples, the first of Jesus’ inner-circle, the Rock on which Jesus said He would build His Church. We hear how Peter follows Jesus at a distance today as He is brought before the High Priest. Peter enters the courtyard of the High Priest and this disciple, this follower of Jesus, this man who loved Jesus dearly, is questioned, not once, not twice, but three times. Each time the question is roughly the same, aren’t you one of His disciples? And each time Peter’s answer is the same as He insists he is not. And in his insisting not once, not twice, but three times, Peter denies Jesus. And after that third denial, the cock crows and Peter suddenly remembers Jesus words from earlier on that same evening, Peter, “Very truly I tell you, before the cock crows you will have denied me three times.” What agony this must have been for Jesus as He hears the cock crow knowing what has taken place. And what agony for Peter.

A few years ago, the Prayers of the People at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. on Palm Sunday began, “we stand with Christ in His suffering. For forgiveness for the many times we have denied Jesus, let us pray to the Lord.” So often the congregation is asked to play the role of the crowd when the Passion is broken into parts. I have heard some are unable to take on this role because they just can’t see themselves as a willing participant in this spectacle calling out so vehemently for someone’s death, let alone Jesus’. Perhaps on these days we hear the Passion account, it might be interesting instead for the congregation to put themselves in Peter’s shoes. Peter gives us such a human vantage point, as denying Jesus is something we have all done. Like Peter we may deny Jesus over and over again and then suddenly realize that denying Jesus is what we are doing. And denial is part of Jesus’ Passion. Every time we act in a way contrary to His teachings, every time we do not turn the other cheek, every time we respond with anger instead of love, every time we sin, we deny Jesus. We do not know this man. We are not one of His followers. This is what we say. These are our words. Christ died for the sins of the world, the sins of the crowd, the sins of Peter, our sins, for the times in our lives when we acted in a way that denied Him. We stand with Jesus today in His suffering because we had a hand in it. We can play the crowd, we can play Peter, we can simply listen but what playing these roles and listening should do is always bring us back to being ourselves, ourselves in this Gospel account. We are there, we all play a part in His Passion and death.

Today we feel Peter’s pain as today we feel our own internal suffering, our own internal passions, our own internal agony because we are forced to look at ourselves and acknowledge our sin, our brokenness and we are also forced to look at Jesus. One

of the images we are confronted with is Jesus hanging on the cross. And as much as we want to turn our eyes away I implore us not to, for in Jesus hanging on the cross we see one final act of Passion an act of dreadful beauty.

We recall how in an act of love God sent His Son into this broken, painful and sinful world, Jesus' Incarnation. Jesus entered into our lives to share our lives, our pain and joys, to be with us. Today we remember how Jesus entered into our lives again. Today is the day we remember how Jesus entered into our sin. Jesus and our sins become linked, intimately linking us to Jesus in what can only be described as dreadful beauty, dreadful in our sin and beauty in Jesus entering that sin. Sin, those acts that separate us from God, from one another, from creation, Jesus enters into . These times of tremendous darkness in our life Jesus enters into and He takes these upon Him this day. He takes our rejection of Him, of God, of one another, of all creation upon Himself this day. He takes the horror, the apathy, the hate, the evil of humanity upon Himself this day and hangs, hangs there nailed to a cross for hours, dying in excruciating agony with the sins, the hate of the of world upon Him, so that we would be saved. So that the sin of this world would no longer have the power to hurt us, to separate us from God, from Himself, for through His death and Resurrection sin was defeated. We denied Him, we spoke hatred against Him, we nailed Him to a cross, and we do this at times in our lives today and what does He do for us? Hangs on a cross, dies on a cross, so that we would be free, this is truly the love of God. We call today Good, and one reason we call this day Good is because we see just how Good Jesus Christ is.

Jesus died for the sins of humanity who crucified and executed Jesus, and we are a part of humanity. We all play a part in Jesus' Passion and death. This is so

important to hear, to recognize and to accept. For while we have a part in His death, let us never forget, in this, we have a part in His Rising. He died for the sinner, He died for our sins and rose for us three days later, so that we would have life. By His Resurrection He conquered sin and death once and for all ushering in the Salvation of humanity, our Salvation. We have a part in His death and we have a part in His rising, for both of these happened for us, so that we would be saved, reconciled with God and given entrance into God's Kingdom, blessed with eternal life.