

It's hard to imagine, perhaps, that the Cross on which Jesus willingly endured gruesome torture and an agonizing death for our salvation would become, in Paul's words, "the throne of grace."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, that, and the resurrection of Jesus to follow, is the foundational reality of our faith.

Still, I suspect there's something in many of us that often wants to journey straight to Easter without stopping first at Good Friday and the Cross — our own as well as Jesus'. It's not surprising. None of us wants to suffer; most of us do everything we can do avoid it.

Yet there's a reason that in his letters Paul twice makes the striking observation that he feels his life being poured out like a "libation,"<sup>2</sup> and in another passage reports that his "afflictions" have left him "utterly weighed down beyond [my] strength, so that [I despair] even of life."<sup>3</sup>

Yet even then, even in the most desperate circumstances, Paul reports that he finds hope in the Cross of Jesus.

So it is with our afflictions, our suffering. Each of us faces trials. Each of us will sometimes be "smitten" or "pierced," in Isaiah's words,<sup>4</sup> or poured out like a "libation," in Paul's. These are the times, these are the trials, that are like small deaths. These are the times, these are the trials, in which we can sometimes sense life itself draining away.

These are the crosses of our Good Fridays.

We need not despair, however, for perhaps nothing is more intimate to Our Lord than His suffering — and ours. The Paschal Mystery teaches us that at no time, perhaps, are we closer to Christ and He to us than in the Good Fridays of our lives. And where Christ is, hope is. Where Christ is, life is. Where Christ is, redemption is. Where Christ is, renewal is. Where Christ is, resurrection is.

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<sup>1</sup> Heb 4:16 (NRSVCE).

<sup>2</sup> Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6 (NAB).

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 1:8 (NAB).

<sup>4</sup> Isa 53:4 (NAB)

Christ's presence with us on the Good Fridays of our lives does not necessarily change, nor does it necessarily end, our affliction, but it does change the *experience* of our affliction. For we don't bear our crosses alone or despairingly, but with a confidence born of faith that somehow, in a way that we perhaps cannot foresee or understand, the holy presence of God and of His works may be manifested through them,<sup>5</sup> as we may come to see in the fullness of time.

Each of us inevitably passes through first one and then another Good Friday in our human passage, days — and perhaps seasons — in which “human words seem to fall silent before the mystery of evil and suffering,” as Pope Benedict XVI once observed.<sup>6</sup> Yet the Passion of the Lord teaches us that the story of our suffering and its meaning does not end with the silence of human words, for as Benedict goes on to relate, “Faith born of an encounter with God's word helps us to realize that human life deserves to be lived fully, even when weakened by illness and pain ... The Father of life does not cease to bend lovingly over suffering humanity. We contemplate the culmination of God's closeness to our sufferings in Jesus himself ... By his passion and death he took our weakness upon himself and totally transformed it.”<sup>7</sup>

In a few moments, we will come to the foot of the Cross. We'll come as a people, and we will come as a daughter or son of God, called individually, by name, to seek and to keep — to seek His grace, and to keep the love that He extends with arms pierced but not so broken that He can't or won't embrace us.

Mary, His mother; Mary, the wife of Clopas; Mary Magdalene; and John each brought something to the Cross: their love, their faith, their anguish — whatever He had touched most deeply in their lives.

What will we bring?

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<sup>5</sup> Jn 9:3 (NAB)

<sup>6</sup> Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “Verbum Domini,” № 106. The Holy See. [www.vatican.va. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Crucified Lord, I lay at the foot of Your Holy Cross my failings, my lack of compassion, my indifference, my grievances and resentments.

Crucified Lord, I lay at the foot of Your Holy Cross my doubts and my fears, as well as my joys and my blessings.

Crucified Lord, I lay at the foot of your Holy Cross those things from which I cannot free myself, and those things I choose over You.

Crucified Lord, I bring to your Holy Cross my wounds that You may touch them with Yours, that mine might be healed.

Crucified Lord, I bring to your Holy Cross those things in me that must fall to the ground and die before I can rise to new life in You.

Crucified Lord, I come to your Holy Cross because I know that You will transform even these things and make them holy.

I come because I know that even in Your agony, the same arms You extend to heaven reach out to embrace me, and I know that just as You will rise to new life, so too do You reach from the Cross to lift me that I might rise with You.