

Reflections for Good Friday-2025

Readings:- Is; 52:13-53:12 ; Hebrews 4;14-16;5:7-9;Jn 18:1-19:42

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ;

There were three crosses on Golgotha. On the right and on the left were two robbers being crucified for rebellion and murder. On the central cross, Jesus died for our sins. On one side of Jesus hung a criminal who taunted Jesus in disbelief; he died in sin. On the other side of Jesus, however, hung a criminal who believed in Jesus. He scolded the mocker and turned to Jesus. On the central cross (with its title, "*Jesus the Nazarene King of the Jews*," in three languages (Greek, Latin, and Aramaic), hung a sinless Sufferer! He was dying for the sins of the world. Hanging on that cross, Jesus spoke seven times during the closing moments of his earthly life. It has been an age-old practice in the Church to reflect on these last words of Jesus from the cross as an integral part of Good Friday observance so that we may repent of our sins, resolve to renew our lives, and thus be able to participate fully in the joy of Jesus' Resurrection.

1. The word of Forgiveness: "*Then said Jesus, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'*" (Lk 23:34). While the crucified convicts would shriek and curse and spit at the spectators, Jesus, innocent of any crime against God or humanity, betrayed, arrested, scourged and condemned, did not. Now, from the cross, Jesus' thoughts reached above his pain and rejection. Instead of being consumed with his own pain and misery, Jesus asked forgiveness for those responsible for the evil done to him, and, by extension, for all who ignorantly go the way of sin and death. Jesus prayed for those who condemned Him, scourged Him, mocked Him, and nailed Him to the Cross – and for those who from all the nations and down through the years would crucify him by their sins. Jesus practiced what He preached –unconditional, forgiving love. One day Jesus preached on the mountain, "*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you*" (Mt 5:44). Jesus reminded Peter that there should not be any limit to forgiveness. He sadly addressed Judas, leading the soldiers to arrest him, as "Friend!" It is this model which the first Martyr Stephen followed (Acts 7:60). Archbishop Oscar Romero, the outspoken champion of the oppressed, said the same first word of Jesus from the cross, as he was shot dead at the altar. St. Cyprian gave gold coins as his farewell gift to his executioner, and St. Thomas More hugged and kissed his executioner. It was Christ's unconditional forgiveness, with the darkness at

noon, and the earthquake, which prompted the centurion in charge of Jesus' crucifixion and those who were with him, to proclaim, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* (Mt 27:54)

The lesson of–Unconditional Forgiveness: If someone hurts our feelings can we forgive that person, pray for God's blessings on him or her, and continue to treat him or her as our friend? Here is a Chinese proverb: *"One who hates another digs two graves: one for himself and the other for the one he hates."* St. Paul admonishes, *"Be ye therefore kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another"* (Eph 4:32). He advises the Romans: *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good"* (12:20-21).

2. The word of Assurance: *"Then [the criminal who had scolded his fellow criminal for mocking Jesus] said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied to him, 'Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'* (Luke 23:42-43).

3. The word of Comfort: *"When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son.'* Then he said to the disciple, *'Behold, your mother.'* And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (Jn 19:26-27). Jesus' disciples had deserted him; his friends had forsaken him; his nation had rejected him; and his enemies cried out for his blood. But his faithful mother stood there sorrowing at the foot of the Cross. Who can grasp the grief of Mary watching her son suffer – the grief of a mother watching her son die as a criminal on a cross? And who can grasp the grief of the son – the son who must see his mother's heart pierced by a sword as prophesied by Simeon, when Jesus as a baby was presented in the temple? Jesus announces from the cross that he is going to give us the most valuable and the last gift: *"Here is your mother."* Here is the one I love, for you to love, and for her to love you – the one who taught me, the one who fed me, the one who wiped away my tears, the one who hugged me, the one who will be with you and pray for you.

"Woman": This title of honor is what Jesus used to address his mother in public situations; Jesus is calling his mother by the most glorious word at that moment, "woman", reminding us that his mother is the *"woman"* of Gn 3:15, the one whose seed (son, child) will crush the head of the serpent, Satan, with His Blood poured out for us to the last drop. Jesus had nothing else left, but his Mother, and he gave her to us, too. His own Mother was

to be our spiritual Mother in his Church, His Mystical Body, of which He is the head, and the Christians the members. And, as in any other body, the Mother of the Head is also the Mother of the members of the Body, the Mother of each one of us (Col.1:18, Eph 4:5-6). Mary is the Mother of Sorrows, because at the foot of the Cross she suffered in spirit all He suffered in the flesh and, so doing, gave birth to us in Christ. She is indeed our Mother.

The lesson for our Life: This is Jesus' loving death-bed gift to each of us who believe in Him: Jesus' own mother as our mother, the mother of Christians, mother of the Church, to honour, love, respect, and imitate. She is the supreme model of trusting Faith in God, the model of perfect obedience to the will of God and the model of perfect surrender of one's life to God. *"Behold, your mother!"* Pope St. John Paul II said, in addressing World Youth Day (n. 3; ORE, 19 March 2003, p. 6), *"Jesus addresses these words to each of you, dear friends. He also asks you to take Mary as your mother 'into your home', to welcome her 'as one of yours', because 'she will discharge her ministry as a mother and train you and mould you until Christ is fully formed in you.'"* May Mary make it so that we respond generously to the Lord's call, and persevere with joy and fidelity in the Christian mission! The words which the Finger of God engraved on two tables of stone at Mount Sinai were never repealed. The Bible still says, *"Honor your father and your mother."* Those of us, whose parents are still living, need to follow the example of Jesus on the Cross. Women, behold your children; children, behold your mothers.

4. The word of Desolation: *"From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Mt 27:45-46).* This fourth and central Word of Jesus on the Cross is another prayer, taken from Psalm 22. All during His ministry, Jesus had known what it meant to be forsaken. Early, the members of His own family forsook Him. Nazareth, His home-town, had forsaken Him. The nation He came to save rejected Him. But in every such instance He could always steal away to the tender healing fellowship of His Heavenly Father and find his purpose and strength in His presence. But now, even God seems to have turned away from Him, permitting him to experience the ultimate intensity of rejection and loneliness in human life. Hence, Jesus quoted the first portion of Psalm 22:1, a prophecy of the Messiah's suffering and exaltation.

Life lesson: Every one of us experiences despair and rejection at certain periods of our life. When our dear ones die or fall terminally ill, when the only support of the family is accidentally removed, when the spouses are divorced, when the country faces serious threats to its safety, we ask the question, “*Where is God?*” Shortly before he died, Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet), the French atheist and writer, is reported to have said the following words to his physician, “*I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six more months of life.*”

Anecdote: Rose Kennedy’s children nine children were a joy to her. In her 1974 autobiography, *Times to Remember* (as quoted in her obituary), she declares, “*I looked upon child-rearing not only as a work of love and a duty but as a profession ... What greater aspiration and challenge are there for a mother than the hope of raising a great son or daughter?*” Rose, a life-long devout Catholic lost her first son in 1944 in World War II flying a mission from England; her daughter Kathleen was widowed in the same war, in 1948 in a plane crash; her second son, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was assassinated in 1963; and her third son, Robert Francis (“Bobby”), was also shot by an assassin June 5, 1968, the night he won the Democrat Presidential nomination in California; he died the following day. Of her family’s response to all these griefs, she wrote (in the context of Jack’s death), “*We in the family reacted to our common grief in our own ways. But we could all be reasonably steady because of the faith, hope, and love we shared. And because we knew quite well what Jack would want from us. He would want courage, he would want as many smiles as we could manage, and he would want his death to be an affirmation of life*” (382). Rose persevered in her Faith and trust in God, declaring at the end of the autobiography, “*If God were to take away all His blessings, health, physical fitness, wealth, intelligence, and leave me but one gift, I would ask for faith—for with faith in Him, in His goodness, mercy, love for me, and belief in everlasting life, I believe I could suffer the loss of my other gifts and still be happy—trustful, leaving all to His inscrutable providence. When I start my day with a prayer of consecration to Him, with complete trust and confidence, I am perfectly relaxed and happy regardless of what accident of fate befalls me because I know it is part of His divine plan and He will take care of me and my dear ones*” (444) — Jesus invites us to have this kind of trusting Faith, the trusting Faith of the Old Testament Job, in our moments of despair and helplessness.

5.The word of Suffering: *“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst’” (Jn 19:28). “Zhena” – “I thirst,” the fifth word of Jesus from the cross, is the shortest of the seven, reminding us of Ps 22:15: “My throat is as dry as dust, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.”*

6. The word of Triumph: *“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, ‘It is finished’” [“tetelestai”] (Jn 19:30). The Saviour was about to die. It was for this cause that Jesus had come into the world and, now that His mission was accomplished, He declared definitively, triumphally. “It is finished!” meaning the work of salvation entrusted to Him as Messiah of God is now “accomplished, fulfilled, achieved.”*

7. The word of Committal: *“Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’; and when he had said this he breathed his last”(Lk 23:46). Jesus was always submitting Himself to God, and when He died, He died just as He had lived. Jesus entrusted his spirit — his life, and all that had given it meaning, to God his Father in Truth and in Faith. Even at the point of his own abandonment when the good seemed so very far away, he proclaimed his Faith in God, a Light which the darkness could not overcome: “Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit.”*

The lesson for our Life: We, too, are told to *“commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass” (Ps 37:5). Let us live in such a way as to hear the welcome words of God our Father, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17). The Christian should be able (like Stephen in Acts 7), to pray as he was being stoned to death, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:59-60) When we see someone hurting how often have we listened and invited them to prayer? How often have we failed to invite someone to Mass, a prayer service, or Bible study, because of the possibility of rejection? Just as Christ taught us to pray, he also offered this small prayer for strength, “Into your hands, Father, I commend my Spirit” (Lk 23:46).*

Concluding anecdote #1) “HE DIED FOR ME.” It was February 1941, Auschwitz, Poland. Maximilian Kolbe was a Franciscan priest put in the infamous death camp for helping Jews escape Nazi terrorism. Months went by and in desperation, one of his fellow prisoners escaped from the camp. The camp rule was enforced. Ten people would be rounded up

randomly and herded into a cell where they would die of starvation and a final exposure to lethal gas, as a lesson against future escape attempts. Names were called. A Polish Jew Frandishek Gasovnachek was called. He cried, *"Please spare me, I have a wife and children!"* 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 until August 14, 1941. This story was chronicled on an NBC news special several years ago. Gasovnachek, by this time 82, was shown telling this story while tears streamed down his cheeks. A mobile camera followed him around his little white house to a marble monument carefully tended with flowers. The inscription read: *IN MEMORY OF MAXIMILIAN KOLBE. HE DIED IN MY PLACE.* Every day Gasovnachek lived since 1941, he lived with the knowledge, *"I live 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"* (Jn 15:13).