

## Homily Good Friday 2018

About thirty years ago I saw a movie called *The Mission*. It is set in 18<sup>th</sup> century South America. Robert de Niro plays a rather unsavory character. He was a mercenary soldier and he made his living capturing native peoples and selling them to plantation owners as slaves. In a fiery dispute with his brother he kills him in a duel. He is acquitted of the crime but suffered interiorly because of guilt. He spoke to a priest, Fr. Gabriel, who helped him arrive at a suitable penance. It was to carry a heavy bundle of his armaments through the jungle to the outpost where Fr. Gabriel had established a mission which was a source of refuge and education for the native people. When he arrived at the mission some of the natives recognized him and remembered his evil. But they were moved by his tears that marked the end of his penitential journey and they accepted him. He in turn stayed at the mission to join the Jesuits in their work. It was a great story about sorrow and mercy and repentance.

We are not called to do such an extreme penance for our sins. We believe that Jesus suffered and died on our behalf to spare us the punishment that our sins might otherwise deserve. Our practice of the sacrament of penance does include some gesture of penance upon receiving the gift of forgiveness. It is usually a prayer or specific action that serves as a reminder that our sins do inflict damage in the world and to the honor of God, and we should do something to help repair that damage.

On this Good Friday the Church directs our attention in a special way to the passion of Jesus Christ, to His suffering and death. It is Jesus' great offering to the Father so that our guilt can be assuaged by His suffering. Our service is simple and low key. The scriptures accented our belief in what really happened to the divine person, Jesus Christ, almighty God in human flesh. We heard in the first reading one of the old testament prophecies about the suffering servant who would come into the world and suffer to "take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses." Written hundreds of years before the time of Jesus it accurately presents the basic truth about the redemption Jesus accomplished and it provides a description that is echoed in the events recorded in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' suffering. Our second reading from the letter to the Hebrews confirms the early Christian faith in what Jesus accomplished in the suffering that, in the author's words, "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Jesus."

To keep a realistic but not morbid remembrance of the cross and suffering of Jesus prevents us from confusing mercy with indifference. The image of Christ crucified reminds us that Jesus does care whether we sin. He cares that He is sometimes

ignored or rejected. He cares because He knows that in sinning we only hurt ourselves or others.

Our special attention to the suffering and death of Jesus all the more prepares us to appreciate the power of His resurrection which we celebrate on Easter. The glory of Easter shines all the much more brighter when it is seen through and above the cross of crucifixion.

In perpetuating the effective presence of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the Mass we are called to always look at resurrection through the cross. It is where we gain the grace, the strength, the courage to push through our own sufferings, our own crosses. We push through physical, spiritual and moral sufferings to be raised up to a fuller and richer life of, once again from the author to the Hebrewes, renewed obedience to Jesus. I think there is wisdom in the Church's direction that the image of Christ crucified is visible near the altar for the Mass. It is a wisdom powerful reflected in the large mounted crucifix. Ours is covered now. However in a moment we will unveil a smaller representative of the cross with the image of Christ crucified. We will then be invited forward to venerate, to touch, to bow, to kiss the cross offering adoration to the one who save us through that cross. With this action may we renew our request to be raised up above sin and its effects and renew our commitment to let Him raise us up day after day.