

Good Friday 2017

For centuries Christians have followed Christ to the cross, to contemplate the crucified Jesus, and to express our solidarity with Him.

We come here today for the same reason.

But after hearing the reading from the prophet Isaiah we might wonder: Could this person really be the one God has sent to save us, one who, the readings say, was disfigured, beaten, afflicted, condemned, oppressed, rejected, and cursed, not to mention hated and laughed at?

An unimpressive person—unattractive even—someone we should avoid? Someone who should best be forgotten?

But there he is – right above us. We see that massive cross every time we enter this space. Do we see him? Do we think about him?

Or do we come here week after week and not even notice this huge cross suspended over the place where we worship?

This beautiful crucifix painting – today draped with a cloth - as well as the paintings above the baptismal font, and the painting of St Joseph, outside the chapel that bears his name, were all done in icon style by Brother William Woeger, the liturgical consultant, for this worship space, dedicated 20 years ago.

Our “Guide to the Sanctuary”, written at the time of our dedication, tells us that an icon is an image that represents something that can’t be seen.

Good works of sacred art point beyond themselves. Icons do this in a powerful way.

The large eyes, the slight but deliberate distortion of the face and body, and the direct face-to-face confrontation with the viewer give a sense of looking into another world.

An icon image jolts one's ordinary perceptions and thus inspires the imagination, helping us to partake of the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery.

Part of that mystery is the seemingly contradictory messages of the cross: an image of suffering and death, but also of resurrection, new life, and the victory over death.

The cross is an image of what human hatred and violence can do, yet also of the greatest love: to lay down one's life for others.

As our reading of the Passion shows, humanity could not stop itself from denying and even murdering the very Son of God, yet Christ was willing to make himself vulnerable in order to show how infinite is God's love and forgiveness.

So in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, like the paschal lamb that was sacrificed on behalf of the people, the Suffering Servant of God allows himself to be handed over to the slaughter.

Though innocent, he takes upon himself the guilt of the very ones who are putting him to death.

You know we count as heroic those who place themselves at risk in order to save someone else. But to give your life for ones torturers is beyond our human comprehension.

Yet that is what Christ has done. He is the one who has allowed himself to be taken, to be afflicted, to be spurned and pierced for our offenses and for the offenses of all of humanity.

Also importantly, Christ's Passion points in some sense to all the suffering in the world. It helps to give meaning to that suffering.

As we hear and read and see every day, so many in our world suffer because of civil war, terrorism, religious persecution, and the like.

Others face terrors or carry crosses closer to home:

--living with disappointments and circumstances that cannot be changed, but trusting in God all the same

--there is the cross of sickness that crushes body and spirit, and ultimately there is the cross of looking into the face of death and doing so with faith.

Christ bears the suffering of others, and shows how God does not fail to notice the pain people experience, and so calls all of us to take that same notice and be compassionate and merciful and supportive to anyone who is suffering.

At times all we can do and all we can say are those words of our psalm: “Abba, Abba Father, I put my life in your hands.”

We pray this for we are certain that the defeat on the cross will be followed by the triumph of the resurrection.

Good Friday also reminds us that not all of our deliverance will be in this life. We must live in hope of a future complete fulfilment of God’s promise in our own resurrection from the dead.

The one the prophet talks about today was not only crushed: He was raised, made to prosper, empowered to give life.

“King of the Jews” was the crime for which he was tried and sentenced and executed. It was the title inscribed above his bloody throne.

Lifted up on the cross, he was lifted up in triumph and exaltation. He is not the conquered King, he is the conquering King.

He is the "great high priest who has passed through the heavens." Though we mark his death today, we know our savior lives. The communion we will share in a few moments is proof of his living presence, even as he hangs on a cross.

As we come forward now to reverence the cross don't forget to notice the icon painting -faithful to the Gospel of John that we read today – with the Virgin Mary on the left and St John on the right. Confidently then we approach – the cross to find mercy and to find grace.