Homily for Good Friday 2026 Year A

Usually on Good Friday, the church is stark and bare. There are no bright colours. No flowers to decorate the altar. The Tabernacle is open and empty, the altar is stripped bare. The sanctuary light has been quenched. All signs of life have been removed. The church is dead and empty.

It reminds us of the feeling of emptiness and devastation that the early church must have felt at the death of Christ.

Long used to His company, He was suddenly and brutally taken from them, humiliated and destroyed. And now in the shock of all that they had witnessed from a distance, they felt more alone, perhaps more than they had ever felt in their lives.

They had not only known Christ but, living in His company they had come to love Him. For three years they could see Him, touch Him, listen to Him, eat with Him and speak to Him. Christ's continuing presence with them had built up and deepened a living relationship. Now it was all gone. With that first pain that goes with sudden and unaccountable loss they withdrew from the world and into themselves. The pain of loss slowly began to mingle with fear, fear now that they were on their own. They had come so far with Christ. They believed and hoped in His promises. What now was left without Him?

If they could have thought for a moment, they would have remembered the many times that Christ had warned them that He would be taken away from them, taken to where they could not yet follow. Indeed, He stressed it was absolutely necessary that He must leave them, so that the Holy Spirit might come upon them and strengthen them in their mission.

They must have listened to this many times, yet never could they have envisaged the terrible manner of His leaving them.

Being all too human the apostles must have focused only upon the pain and suffering of the tragedy they had just witnessed. The love and security they had felt in the presence of Christ was now washed away by the terrible sense of His absence.

But love, if it is at all real, is much stronger than death, and that is one of the important lessons of Christ's passion for us.

It was only because of the great love that He bore for us that Christ was able to overcome the doubts of Gethsemane, the humiliation of the scourging and was able to pick up that cross and bear it to the very point of His death. Christ had emptied himself to become man, and now a final act of total selflessness was sealed forever upon the pages of history. That was the extent of His great love for us.

When we as human beings draw back from suffering, when we protest under the pain, when we are totally stunned by the loss or absence of the one we love, what we are actually doing is indulging in the all too human feeling of self-love. We grope to make sense of our own mental and physical pain. In that very groping, we are motivated by self-love. Why should this happen to me? Why do I suffer? While am I left alone? ……Why do I have to die?

In very simple terms, the lesson of Christ's passion and death must mean for us as Christians, followers of Christ, that the very real pain of mental and physical suffering, and the loneliness and isolation of a sense of absence or loss, must be turned upside down or inside out, so that they are no longer shot through with self-pity and self-love, but rather vehicles to carry us through into an entirely different dimension of love.

All of us have suffered degrees of pain, a loss in our lives, and we almost certainly will again in the years to come. If we have been defeated and bowed down by that pain and loss, then the hard thing to face is maybe that we are the cause of our own continuing grief. We love ourselves too much to forget the pain. The pain and hurt itself may have long passed, but the memory remains. We won't let ourselves forget that it happened to us. But what a different feeling altogether if we have bravely borne and defeated personal suffering and loss. Looking back through the dark tunnel through which we have passed, we feel much stronger for having endured and for having survived.

It seems to be a rule of life that all great acts of creativity are borne out of suffering. The lives of great artists, writers and composers are shot through with pain and suffering. There are the brief days when they can bask in the warmth and sunlight of public acclaim, but there were even more long dark nights of loneliness, anguish and suffering. The spark of genius, which is the touch of God, enables them to forge out of their experience lasting monuments to the unquenchability of the human spirit. Those monuments remain, not just as works of beauty in themselves, but as a reminder to us that

all things pass and are passing, and that the hard road we feel we are on has been trodden before and should never end in defeat. Our own personal acts of courage, endurance and joy in the face of suffering can be our monuments of beauty, seen by those around us, and will be forever echoed in their lives long after we have gone.

All roads lead to somewhere, and the road that Christ staggered along led to Calvary, then onto His tomb, but then on again to the Resurrection.

St Paul warns us that all of creation forever groans in the great act of giving birth. All the personal pain in our lives is the slow chipping away of the old man and the act of giving birth to the new. As Christians we have undertaken to walk the same road as Christ onto the Resurrection and our new selves. However, first we must walk our own personal road to Calvary with Christ and learn how to bear our own cross with great love. We may stagger and fall, but we will rise again to final victory. St Paul again reminds us that love is patient and kind and endures all things. It is stronger than death and helps us to survive the times when God seems to have left us and we must bear our pain alone.

We are never alone, and all things pass. Love alone survives. Let us learn how to look at the Cross of Christ when it shines in our lives. Recognising it for what it is, let us pick it up with great love, patience and endurance. Let us bear it for as long as God wishes, but it will never defeat us. And now, as for Christ on Good Friday, there was the pause, the rest and the silence of the tomb. But in a little while the Joy and the Light of the Resurrection.