

Fr Tom's homily for the Celebration of the Lord's Passion Good Friday 2020

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13-52:12
Second Reading Hebrews 4:14-16,5:7-9
Gospel: John 18:1-19:42

The one thing that we will remember of a Good Friday service is the Adoration of the Holy Cross. Most of us would genuflect or kneel before the cross and kiss it. I always find it moving watching everyone come up to the cross, the very old with all their life experiences or the very young who for them it is mysterious, but still they know something special is happening. The Adoration of the Cross is what we will remember most because it is experiential and expressive.

I've heard it said that the waiting in line is a bit like waiting to meet someone important. The expectation grows as we come nearer to that person. And when we finally come face-to-face with that important person, then everything around us doesn't really matter anymore. It will just be us and that person.

Similarly, as we come before the Cross, we have come to that intimate moment with Jesus who suffered and died for us, and we express what is most personal to us. We kiss the cross and we hold the cross and we become personal and emotional before the Cross. It is a moment that lasts hardly 2 seconds and yet the memory of it is seared into our hearts. That is because we are seeing and touching a real experience of the greatest love of all.

Alas, this year, all we have are memories of the past Good Fridays and memories of our personal experiences of how we venerated the Cross. But we still can have that experience as we follow the online Good Friday service or when we have a prayer service at home with our families.

But we can venerate the cross in our own home, using the crosses that are ours. We all have ones that are special to us. Let us take up that cross and venerate it.

But we are also called to take up our cross and follow the Lord. But what does that mean? We often talk about carrying our crosses. When I first moved to London in 1995 I lived in the East End. There was a woman who I would visit from church and we would sit and talk about all sorts of things. I don't know how we got onto the subject, but we started talking about our crosses that we had to bear. As she sat she pointed to the corner of the room and said, "that's my cross there!" What was she pointing at? Her husband. Now we could leave it at that and think it a nice amusing story, but it was in that cross that I saw what love was about; as he nursed and loved her as she died from a brain tumour. The cross was something that oozed

love and compassion. The husband tried to give her the best life that he could. For me that was the Grace of the Cross personified. The cost that the husband faced was immense, but the love that flowed from it was even greater. The cross is all about that free and unconditional love that Jesus gives us.

This year, our crosses and the crosses of many others who are affected by the current pandemic are especially heavy and rough and tough. With the rest of our brothers and sisters, we feel the pain of the Cross, we feel the weight of the Cross, we stumble and fall as we feel the Cross crushing us. And we also feel like being nailed to the Cross and that we are coming to a dead end, in every sense of the word.

On this day as we look at the Cross, we must also feel the pain and the sufferings of our less fortunate brothers and sisters who are struggling in these depressive difficult times.

Today our hearts can be drawn by God's love revealed on the hard wood of the cross. As we venerate the cross we can bring everything to the Cross and offer it to the Lord. Cardinal Hume talks about that moment. He writes

We come to the altar to venerate the cross. It is a very personal and individual action. Our forefathers called it "Creeping to the Cross" I like the expression. Each of us carries quietly and silently his or her own burden, a private sorrow, a secret pain, a personal grief. We creep with our load to the Cross. The simple gesture of kissing the wounds of Christ helps to heal the wounds we carry within ourselves.

We can cry out like the Good Thief "Jesus, remember me" but our prayer is more than a selfish request, it is a communal prayer.

Jesus, remember those who are suffering and in pain from the infection of the virus, and also those who have succumbed to the infection.

Jesus, remember the doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and front liners as they continue to serve and also to protect them.

Jesus, remember those who have lost their jobs and those who are in financial difficulties caused by these difficult times.

Jesus, remember all of us as You lead us through this valley of Darkness into Your kingdom of light.

The cross that shows us just how much God loves us.

Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world.: come, let us adore.