

Good Friday

3<sup>rd</sup> April 2015

“Again in spite of that we call this Friday ‘good’.”

Is 52–53: *He was pierced through for our faults*

Ps 30: *My life is in Your hands, deliver me from the hands of those who hate me.*

Heb 4; 5: *During His life on earth He offered up prayer and entreaty ...*

Jn 18–19: the Passion according to John.

The Church keeps today as the foremost day of penance in the whole year. Along with Ash Wednesday, at the start of Lent, today is a day of compulsory fasting and abstinence from meat (for most of us anyway). It’s a culmination of the fasting that we have been practising throughout Lent, whether it was fasting from chocolate, or alcohol, some other food or drink, or fasting from negative comments or irritability with others ... Today, Good Friday, is a day of greater fasting, as we come to the crux of Lent, the “low point” of our putting Jesus on a Cross. Let’s keep this fast with great faith — if you feel hungry at some point today, don’t satisfy it with a snack; offer it up as a sacrifice! Let your rumbling tummy remind you that Jesus hungered so much for your love that He was willing to die out of love for you. If you feel like popping to the shops, don’t! — offer it up as a sacrifice, and spend the time in prayer instead. Jesus didn’t wander the markets of Jerusalem

today; He was forced through the narrow streets, beaten by rough soldiers, no chance to pause and window shop.

Today’s liturgy is also a “fast” in many ways. Little decoration: no flowers or candles, few colourful covers, no refreshing water in the holy water stoups, and even a stripped altar. Today’s Passion service is bare and stark, no beauty to distract us from the ugly fact ... We have killed the Son of God; man has welcomed the loving Saviour with hatred and violence, has got Him out of the way because His goodness reminds us of what we do wrong. Even though the Lord came precisely to lead us out of sin and away from our evil tendencies, yet we were not willing to bear it. He died as a consequence of our sins. What sin can be greater than to turn against one’s Maker, to eliminate the hand that formed you? And yet, even this, the greatest sin of all history, to crucify Jesus, is forgiven by God. He loves us so much, that He wants to forgive us even this.

The Passion liturgy speaks to us of this very powerfully, as we cannot today hide behind any trimmings.

In a few moments' time we will begin our 'creeping to the Cross' — our solemn and prayerful veneration of the wood on which He died. Again, it's a bare and stark action. We come in gentle song, and with thanksgiving in our hearts, to kiss the feet of the one we love; to kiss the feet of the Son of God who has climbed Calvary for us, despite the pain and the punishment viciously meted out on Him. The Cross is held high, in a few minutes, for us to adore and fall down before. The Cross, sign of Jesus's suffering, but sign of His victory. We long to come and kiss it, to show our deep love and relief, that our sins are not a dead-end; our sins are not a growing and growing burden on our souls. We have relief, we have the remedy, in the Cross of Jesus.

So, let's make this whole day an act of love for Jesus. Not just this 1.5hrs of the Passion service, but all the penances and fasting that we do today. Let's truly say at the end of today that we have marked Good Friday as a day of real penance and prayer. We can't 'make up' for our sins; and we can't save ourselves. It is only by God's

free and gracious gift that we are saved; and it's not that by our penances we convince God to change His mind and forgive us. But, still, it is right to do penance today, to fast and pray, as a mark of our deep gratitude to our Saviour. None of us looks forward to his/her death. We all dread it at some level, in case it is accompanied by illness and pain; but none of us is ever likely to have to suffer the sort of barbaric death that Jesus did; and none of us will ever have to suffer the weight of the sins of all the world, to suffer as the Son of God suffered, seeing all the crimes and wrongdoing that man commits against man and against God. So it's right for us to fast ... to unite our little, little actions of penance with the great act of penance that Jesus took upon Himself for us, ... for me!

Come, come to kiss the Cross; come, come — if you are able — to receive in Holy Communion the sacred body of the Lord. On this Cross, and in this body He saved us. No wonder we have such devotion, deep love, and emotion on this day. The Lord has given His life for us; let us, with all our hearts, give this whole Friday to Him, for it is Good.