

Good Friday

30th March 2018

'God is not dead!'

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 Good-Friday service is a unique one in the Catholic calendar. No other day's liturgy in the whole year is like this one, and for good reason, of course, since it is the sacred day of Our Lord's Crucifixion. It is a stark liturgy, almost 'bare.' We enter in silence, we disperse in silence, and fittingly so, for the death of the Lord on the Cross. Our Service begins with the Word — the great readings including the St John's powerful Passion account, and then the universal prayers for the Church and the world, for believers and non-believers alike. And then our solemn service continues with the Cross: the veneration of the wood on which our Saviour hung for those hours of agony at the culmination of His earthly life. The Cross is lifted up for us to gaze on with humble thanksgiving, and then we 'creep to the Cross' ... we come forward to kiss lovingly that rough instrument on which He died, on which He saved us.

But perhaps the most surprising part of our Good Friday service is the last part: the Holy Communion; the fact that, even after commemorating the death of Christ we still

partake of the sacred body of the Lord in Communion. Now, not even all Catholic rites around the world include Holy Communion at the Good Friday service, but we Latin-rite Catholics do, and have done for centuries. Why is that? Why do we not fast from Holy Communion on this solemn day of Jesus's death? Well, it was put so well and so clearly last Saturday when we had a Jesuit priest, Fr Dominic, here, to lead us in a Lent mini-retreat day. He said it so many times, so we could not miss it. "God is not dead," he said, ... "God is not dead." Even when we have cruelly and sinfully crucified Our Blessed Lord Jesus, God is not dead. And our receiving Holy Communion is a clear statement of that. Although humanity has shamefully mistreated the Son of God, and exposed Him to the most barbaric death conceivable, yet God is not dead ... He has gone, in the fullness of His divine immortal life, to the realms of the dead, so as to restore life. It is as if the devil thought that by enticing man to put the Lord to death, we would have somehow gain mastery over the world. Instead, Jesus submits Himself to mortal death so that He might go as far

from God the Father of life as it is possible to go: right into the jaws of death. But the Lord is not destroyed in death: He brings His life to the dead, He lies in the grave but is not finished. He is still at work, silently and powerfully, His divine soul bringing light to all those righteous human beings who lay in death. This is what we mean when we profess in the Apostles' Creed: "He descended into Hell." God is not dead — even in human death He is powerfully alive, and bringing the hope of new life to the dead.

And so today when we conclude our service with Holy Communion consecrated yesterday evening at the Holy Thursday Mass, let us reflect on that fact that God's life, His immortal, almighty being-alive, is more powerful than anything else. In Holy Communion we receive the living God, the risen Jesus, who cannot be contained by death, even though we subjected Him to the worst death imaginable! And this, please, God, also allows us to cope with the bereavements that we suffer. Often the death of a loved one (a grandparent, a parent, a child) is one of the hardest moments in life. For some it leads to a time of

wavering in faith. But today, Good Friday, should help us to have the medicine to heal that doubt, and to be renewed in hope. God is not dead! On the Cross, Jesus has embraced human death, embraced it in a loving gesture, and restored the dead to God in Himself. So, the worst that we can experience, even the loss of a loved one, can be placed alongside this worst experience of Jesus's life, His Passion — and there we see that Jesus willingly accepted it, and reversed its effects. He took the sting out of death, He drew the poison out of the wound of sin. And He can do the same for our doubts, fears, and sadnesses. His life is unconquerable, even on Good Friday. As we receive the holy life of God in Jesus at this Holy Communion today, let's bring especially our deceased loved ones to Him — carrying them in our hearts as we come up to receive — that the living Jesus may give them life through our supplications and prayers, even as He feeds our souls also with life. God is not dead! He is alive; He is the conqueror; and He offers us the rich rewards of His victory on Calvary.