

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As I suggested on Sunday, what we refer to as the Passion of Christ wasn't really his passion as we understand the word passion. Passion for us means that which motivates us, enthralls us, excites us. Passion is that which drives us.

Again, as I said on Sunday, the word, passion, is taken from the Latin, passio, which means "to suffer". So, more accurately, we should be entitling this passage of Scripture which we just heard as "The Suffering of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to John.

The real passion of Christ can best be understood in a brief verse from the prophet, Isaiah: "the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him". That was the real passion of Jesus of Nazareth. It wasn't to be arrested, tortured, and put to death in a most horrible way. Christ's passion was to do the will of God.

And God's will was that we should not suffer because of our sins. It is God's will that we not suffer the shame and guilt of our sins. It is God's will that that one other than ourselves make recompense, or pay the price, for our afflictions.

Again, Isaiah says it best, amazingly almost 800 years before God takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth: "...it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; but the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all...Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear...because he

surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses.

That is the real passion of Jesus Christ. God, his Father and ours, wanted to save us from ourselves, save us for Himself. Each of us is so precious to Him that, as St. Paul told us on Sunday in his Letter to the Philippians: “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

This event which we celebrate on this Good Friday, the suffering and dying of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary, is God’s way of not just telling us, but showing us, how passionately he loves us.

Recognizing that, knowing that, believing that, how might this passionate love that God has for us impact our lives?

First and foremost it tells us that the price of our foolish sinfulness has been paid. It reminds us what the Psalmist tells us that God “remembers your sins no more.” All the sins of our life have already been forgiven once and for all in the suffering and dying of Jesus Christ. It also tells us to let go of all the guilt and the shame that we have been carrying because we have sinned.

You might say, “Wait a minute, Father. Then what’s the point of Confession? Why do we need this Sacrament of Reconciliation?”

Well, first of all, because it is a Sacrament—an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace, or as it is more commonly taught today, an outward sign of God’s love for us. We always speak of celebrating the Sacraments. When we speak of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are truly celebrating God’s already-forgiving love—the love shown to us by God in the suffering and dying of His only-begotten Son.

When we celebrate God’s merciful love, recognizing how passionately he loves us, we Christians, but most especially us Catholics, ought to be the happiest, most joyful, most positive people on the face of the earth. The only reason we’re not is because we are still filled with self-hatred or self-loathing, because though God has forgiven us, we are often incapable of forgiving ourselves. Or, perhaps, we worry more about what other people may think of us, rather than rejoicing in this passionate love that God has for us.

As we travel this road to Calvary with Jesus, we see him rejected by everyone around him, even his dearest friends abandon him. So that we know that Jesus understands the pain we feel when we experience rejection. As he carries his cross, he stumbles and falls not once, but time and time again. Finally, Simon the Cyrene, is called forth to help him bear the terrible burden. Like Jesus, we too stumble and fall. But, trusting in the mercy of God, we can be assured that he will find a way or send someone into our lives, to pick us and up and keep on going.

We all suffer physical pain, but which of us can imagine the excruciating pain of being thrown to the ground, dragged naked onto the rough bark of a tree, and then have nails driven through flesh and bone and muscle? God knows the pain and suffering which we will encounter in our lives. He joins us in it. But, there are times, like Jesus, when we are suffering, we feel all alone. We may even feel like him, the total absence of God. “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” It is in those moments that, like Jesus, we are called to the deepest faith, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” And lest we forget, no matter how we have been wronged; treated unfairly or unjustly; been insulted, mocked, or even falsely accused, we are invited to look down from the cross with Jesus on those who are killing him most cruelly and pray, “Father forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”

This is the real passion of Jesus Christ, teaching us to accept and rejoice in the merciful love of God, in His Body broken for us and His Blood poured out for us. Such is the Father’s Will as we celebrate this Good Friday.