

Good Friday
All Saints Parish

March 29, 2013
Rev. Fred Daley

The Fruits of Suffering

Ann Lamott tells a story in her book "Bird by Bird," about an eight-year-old boy with a younger sister who was dying of leukemia and who needed a blood transfusion in order to live.

The parents asked the little boy, Tommy, if he could have his blood tested and he agreed. His blood matched his sister's blood perfectly. Tommy was then asked if he would donate his blood to his sister and he said he would have to think about it over night.

The next morning Tommy told his parents solemnly that he was willing to donate his blood. In the hospital, Tommy was put in the bed next to his sister and both children were hooked up to IV's. After the nurse took a pint of blood from Tommy and put it in his sister's IV, Tommy lay there in silence watching the blood drip slowly into his sister. Almost immediately, his sister soon became much better and later that morning when the doctor came in to see how the children were doing, Tommy opened his eyes and asked the doctor, "How soon now until I die?"

Poor little Tommy thought that giving his blood to his sister meant that he was going to die. Yet, he was filled with so much love that he was willing to lay down his life for his sister.

My sisters and brothers, last night at our Holy Thursday Service, we reflected on the essential command of Jesus to serve one another in love. Service – an essential component of being a disciple of Jesus – not fluff, not an incidental. Without this essential component of service, one cannot be a disciple...

The story of Jesus' passion and death compels us to reflect on another essential component of being a discipline, (a requirement Tommy had a pretty good handle on) and that is the willingness to suffer and, yes, maybe even die for the sake of the Gospel ...for the sake of love. My brothers and sisters, the beautiful vision of Jesus, the mission of Jesus, to birth the world to become the world God intends it to be; a world where we are all children of God, brothers and sisters living in peace, serving one another, forgiving one another, loving one another especially those with the least, this will never come about if we are not willing to suffer for what is right, for what is love.

What do I mean? Jesus suffered and died on the cross, not to atone to an angry father who was into child sacrifice, (that's a pretty sick interpretation of the events of Good Friday, I think).

Jesus suffered and died on the cross – as a criminal receiving the death penalty – because *he dared to confront the powers and principalities – both religious and secular – who were oppressing the people. Jesus received the death penalty because he dared to rock the boat.*

Jesus received the death penalty because he refused to respond to violence with violence. Jesus had the courage and love to accept suffering and death in order to break the cycle of violence and bring about the reign of God.

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The question for us – as disciples of Jesus – is: Are we willing to risk suffering in order to do the right thing? Are we willing to suffer in order to bring about the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven?

As the Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was assassinated in his attempt to stop Hitler said, “Christianity, without the willingness to suffer for what is right, is “Cheap Christianity” – we might say: ‘Christianity Lite.’ In reality, it is *no Christianity at all.*

A few weeks ago, thousands of Americans gathered at a famous bridge outside Selma, Alabama where, 50 years ago, 600 people protesting segregation and oppression of African-Americans were violently attacked by police with dogs and fire hoses and beatings. Back then, the President sent the National Guard troops to protect them and the next week: 20,000 brothers and sisters from all over the nation were there to protest the evil of segregation. The following summer, the Civil Rights Bill was passed by Congress and signed by the President. Last week, President Obama signed a bill declaring that bridge a national monument.

Sisters and brothers who were willing to suffer and die ultimately broke the back of the sin of segregation and slowly, the sin of racism and made the reign of God – the “beloved community” – a little bit more of a reality on earth... as it is in heaven.

The question for us this Good Friday 2013 is: Are we willing to risk our comfort and security, our reputation? Are we willing to suffer, to sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom?

Ultimately, a Christianity that is not willing to suffer and even die for what is right – for the truth – for the good... *is no Christianity at all... ..*

Amen.