

Good Friday

Sisters and brothers: on this Good Friday, we gather as Christians throughout the World to commemorate, to remember that Jesus Christ died on a Cross – the victim of Capital Punishment – over 2000 years ago. On this Good Friday, we gather as citizens of our Global Village at a time when our world is bleeding and dying – from war and terrorism, in the Middle East and Africa, in the Ukraine, in that college in Kenya...; and the list goes on. Sisters and brothers dying from hunger and poverty and injustice and greed in a world where the 85 richest people have more wealth than the bottom 50% of the people in the world! A Mother Earth whose air and land and water and creatures are dying because of the violence of one species – the human species – and the list goes on....

What meaning might Good Friday give to this reality? Sisters and brothers, to truly understand Good Friday we first of all need to move beyond the traditional understanding of this day: that a vengeful God demanded that his son die on a cross to make up for – to atone for – our sins so that we could get to heaven.

What kind of a God demands that his son, or anyone, die on a cross for any reason? ...certainly not the loving, compassionate, tender, merciful God revealed to us in the Gospels....

Yes, God desired God's child, Jesus become human – one like us – to show us by word and action how to become fully human, how to become fully the persons and people God intends us to become. God became human to show us how to create the world as God intended; and, yes...

dying is part of the human condition, but God's only child did not die of natural causes. He was assassinated, murdered, crucified – the victim of Capital Punishment at 33 years of age, on the Cross.

God didn't demand Jesus' death, God didn't kill Jesus;
...evil, ...violence, ...fear, ...hatred, ...ignorance killed Jesus.

Jesus was crucified because of what he said and what he did. Jesus – with every ounce of his being – confronted the powers and principalities, both religious and social; the systems, the ways of life, the structures, that diminished life and love, that created hatred and sin and greed and suffering and oppression and injustice and unfairness and violence and death...,

...the very same evils that are the root cause of our world's bleeding and dying today.

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Brothers and sisters, at the heart of Good Friday, is one of the best kept secrets in the Christian tradition: Passion Friday is 'Good Friday' because Jesus broke the cycle of violence: Jesus refused to respond to violence with violence. Passion Friday is 'Good Friday' because Jesus shows us a way out of the insanity of the violence in our world and in our hearts:

"Put away the sword! Those who live by the sword, will die by the sword!"

"Father, forgive them – they do not know what they are doing."

The heart of the Gospel message is that Jesus Christ is a peacemaker – a reconciler – who refuses to use violence to solve conflict. His method: the Cross – accepting suffering with love and not inflicting it on others.

The invitation of the Gospel to love is entirely contradictory to the use of violence.

Jesus wins love through suffering service, violence achieves its goal by force and fear and death.

Jesus' whole life showed the pattern of using peaceful, nonviolent means to attain his end: The Kin-dom of God, The Realm of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus way of peace was not the sword, but appealing to justice, the appeal of a lover suffering for the beloved; calling upon God's grace – that transforms suffering and death into joy and life....

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The challenge for us, for the Church, for the Global Christian Community on this Good Friday 2015, is to ask ourselves and one another: *'In truth, do we worship the God of peace or the God of violence?'*

Is the cycle – where ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hatred and hatred leads to violence running our lives? Or, is truth and love and peace and justice running our lives?

If we are really honest, in our heart of hearts, do we believe that loving one's enemy, forgiveness and nonviolent-redemptive-suffering and working for justice brings peace? Or, do we believe – when push comes to shove – that in this world, only force and power and violence can bring peace?

I invite us now, on this Good Friday, to take a few moments to reflect in our hearts on whether:

'As a disciple of Jesus am I committed to try to be to work for peace – in my heart, in my family and relationships, in my community and neighborhood, in our Parish and in our Nation and our World...?'

And... should you choose, to respond: "I am."