

Pastor Stephen's Message for Good Friday, April 10, 2020

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

May the following prayers, readings and homily, read and prayed together remind us of our unity as the Church, the body of Christ, even in these moments when we must be apart from each other.

Prayer:

Merciful God, your Son was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself. Grant that we who look to his cross in faith may at all times find mercy in him, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings:

Please read Numbers 21: 4 - 9, Ephesians 2: 1 - 10 and John 19: 16b – 42

Homily:

The greatest tragedy of Good Friday is not the crucifixion of our Lord, as horrible as that is for us. It is coming away from the cross with nothing but sorrow and sadness, feeling like death is all there is in today's horrific Gospel reading. Today is not a day to wallow in despair, nor be overwhelmed by tragedy.

One of the earlier names for this day we now call Good Friday was “The Triumph of the Cross”. In many ways this ancient name for today was a very good name because the story of the crucifixion is always read from St. John’s Gospel on Good Friday and in John’s Gospel the crucifixion is a story of Christ’s triumph over the power of darkness and death. Jesus literally reigns from the cross as a victor, defeating the power of death and evil – triumphing over it.

Being drawn to him, and looking upon him lifted up on the cross, we are given life. We are lifted up with him from death to life.

The writer of John’s Gospel wanted to tell us what the cross meant...and so the story becomes the servant of what he wants to tell us about Jesus and his holy cross.

We hear such a different story than we do in the other Gospels... a story where Jesus is a victor, a triumphant King, reigning from the cross and doing his holy work of defeating death and showing us the path to Risen Life.

Jesus is not weak or in need in John’s Gospel. He carries his own cross, without any help from Simon of Cyrene. This is his holy work...and his alone.

There are no words of agony from the cross spoken by Jesus in John’s Gospel...no expressions of feeling abandoned by

the Father are uttered...as in the other Gospels. The words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me", are not heard today in John's Gospel. And Jesus only says he is thirsty, we are told, to fulfill scripture, not because he is in distress. The writer of this Gospel does not deny Christ's agony; but that is not the image he wants to leave us with. You may also notice not no one taunts or mocks Jesus on the cross in John's Gospel.

In the other Gospels, the mocking by the crowds, the soldiers, even those who are also being crucified with Jesus, is relentless. But not so in John's Gospel. It is as if they already know he will be victorious over the power of death...they are mere spectators of his holy work on the cross.

Our Lord forgives those who crucify him, even Pilate. He cares for his mother, even as he hangs on the cross. He is entirely in control of everything that is happening. In John's Gospel this crucifixion would not have happened had Jesus not allowed it to happen, had he not given the authorities permission to crucify him. The cross is Jesus' choice for us, taken up by his own volition.

In John's Gospel, Jesus' last words were, "it is finished". His holy work of being lifted up on the cross was complete, and now, by being lifted up on the cross, he begins drawing all people to himself as he had promised...into his Risen Life. We are drawn to him by the great love he has shown to us. He draws us into his Easter life, as he himself was lifted up from death to life and shows us that resurrection was indeed true, that it would happen

as he promised and that all things were indeed possible with God. The cross became for us our path and way of life.

May God bless us this day, this Good Friday, as we contemplate the mystery and wonder of our salvation through the cross of Christ our Lord, who in being lifted up on the cross draws us forever to him. May he bring us to a joyous Easter through the Triumph of his Cross. **Amen.**

Prayers of the Faithful:

Gracious God, lifted up on the cross you draw all people to your mercy and grace. Let us look at your cross and see your great love for us, your compassion and grace for all your beloved ones and live. Lift up our hearts to you for you are the source of life and hope and the giver of peace beyond all understanding. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all in our parish who are troubled by fear and uncertainty. Grant us peace in our struggles and hold us in your loving arms. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who mourn, that they may be comforted. Fill us with gratitude for the lives of your faithful ones who have inspired us by their devotion and integrity. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our loved ones we can no longer see or visit. Grant them, and us, patience and hope. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gathering our prayers into one, we pray the prayer you taught us. Our Father...

May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us, keep us in steadfast faith, and hold us forever in mercy and grace. **Amen**