

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Good Friday, March 30, 2018, Cycle B

Today, Good Friday, in the middle of our Easter Triduum celebration of the Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection – we assemble as a family over the death of a most beloved member of our human family.

On Good Friday, we are those people seen in vision by the prophet Zechariah:

“They shall look on him, whom they have thrust through, and they shall mourn as for an only son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a first-born.”

In fact, so conscious are we, this day, of Jesus' tragic violent death, that we do not celebrate Mass when we gather for worship. We move away from the Sacramental Commemoration of Jesus' death, and instead, fix our stunned gaze upon the broken, dead body of Jesus.

Therefore, we gather on Good Friday in a state of quiet; yes, we are stunned into a silence, taken aback by the tragic violence of Jesus' death. However, we should not be shocked, stunned about the violence Jesus endured in His crucifixion. Abusive violence is the story of the human race.

Several years ago, archaeologists opened a grave which was very near the place (and in the time) to the tomb of Jesus. After the custom of those days, the gravesite held the remains not of a single person but several.

In the grave, the diggers found: A woman who had died in childbirth, her mangled baby nestled in her arms; a child of about 12 missing an arm – the boy probably died from the loss of blood because the arm had been cut off as a punishment for stealing; a man who had been strangled to death, probably the result of an argument or robbery; a woman who had been stoned to death – probably for the perceived sin of adultery; two men who had been executed.

Do you understand? Not one person in that grave had died a natural death. Violence and violent death – was a way of life for the people Jesus knew best, the people he walked with, ate with, and loved.

So, we shouldn't be shocked at the extremely violent death Jesus endured. If Jesus was to become the source of eternal Salvation for all humanity, then God in Jesus had to become perfectly human. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us Jesus was made perfectly human! Perfectly human meant that God in Jesus had to immerse Himself totally in what the human race is; abusive, violent, and blood thirsty.

Jesus tells Pilate: The reason I was born and the reason I came into the world is to testify to the truth. And Pilate asks Jesus: “What is truth?” The truth, the Good News, is that God in Jesus took our violence, took our suffering, and took our death and nailed our violent, sinful humanity to the Cross! On the Cross Jesus shows that the violence of crucifixion has no power to rob Him of Life. Pilate tells Jesus “Do you not know that I have the power ... to crucify you?” And Jesus comes back: “You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above.” In other words: Pilate, you have no power over me.

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Though Pilate and the Sanhedrin think they are executing Jesus; Jesus has this to say when He proclaims himself the Good Shepherd in John's Gospel: "...I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes my life from me, but I lay down my own. I have power to lay my life down, and power to take it up again."

The Good News of Good Friday is that Jesus and we are in control – because Jesus and we (in Jesus) are one with the Father – who alone has the power of life in his hands. Jesus says the Father and I are one.

Great faith is needed to accept that Jesus and we are really in control – and not Suffering and Death. For when we look upon the Body of the Crucified Jesus hanging helplessly on the Cross, we can indeed be so overtaken by the horror of it all that we lose all sense of hope.

But the Jesus of the Gospel of John does not cry out in anguish "my God, my God why have you forsaken me!" as Jesus does in the synoptic gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. No, the Jesus of John is absolutely in control and it is He who decides it is Finished –Deliberately handing over His Spirit to the Father.

John does not present a picture of Jesus who is a victim: John's Jesus – is quite different than the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, and Luke – where events control Jesus! John presents a different Jesus - who while enduring violence and death is the one who exercises real power.

Paul's great Christological Hymn from his Letter to the Philippians sums it up so well: On Palm Sunday we began Holy Week with Paul's hymn:

He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave,

Becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

God exalted him, bestowed on him the name above every name Jesus Christ is Lord.

The Good News that turns the Agony of this Friday in Good Friday and into Easter Glory is that suffering, evil and death have no real power over God's Son – or over us whom Jesus enables to become God's children.