

GOOD FRIDAY LITURGY:

March 29, 2024

What can be said on this Good Friday? People are dying in warfare and violence, children are starving. There are families without fathers and fathers without families; there are displaced people; there are rivers of children's tears. The Jesuit priest, Andriy Zelenskyy, the chief military chaplain of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church asks himself this question. "What can be said on Good Friday?" And we all ask the same question. How do we get beyond fear, indifference, despair, avoidance and find hope? This is what Father Andriy asked himself. How does he preach hope?

Confronting such profound suffering, not only in Ukraine, but in Israel, Gaza, Haiti and in many places in our world, including in our own land, forces us to the dregs of humanity says Andriy. We face the brutality and inhumanity of life pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human. We must grapple with the depths of human cruelty and resilience.

How to begin? Hope must start within each of us. It begins with my search for hope. This is a part of my search for sense, to find God in everything that's happening around us. As a follower of Jesus Christ, I look to him for some meaning. Not in the charm of the birth on Bethlehem nor family life in Nazareth, helpful as these are. But we look to his message of love, of humility, of self-emptying for the sake of the kingdom. And, of course we look to the cross. Not a pretty sight. As in Gaza and elsewhere we are on the edge of humanity in profound suffering. Christ was at the edge of humanity but in his life and death we find that humanity does not fall beyond its edges.

We have spent too much time berating ourselves, how our sins have caused Jesus' suffering and how, in his paschal mystery, he has atoned for all our sins. But Good Friday is the feast of hope and, even more so, of love. The Creator has made a world of plenty, of abundance but humans have not shared. Our economic systems reward the rich and deprive the poor. The created world gives us the means to care for the poor, the hungry, to care for all God's creatures. We are on this earth to learn how to love, to pour out ourselves for others, to share all we have with those do not have. But selfishness and greed and fear have prevented God's plan from being fruitful.

Does God give up on us or punish us. NO! We punish ourselves. But God does not cease to love. God shows, from the inside, what being human is supposed to be.

In Jesus, God embraces every aspect of humanity including suffering and death. The body of the God-man, Jesus, dies and is consigned to the earth where his body will begin to rot.

Today we celebrate, we give thanks, we honor the cross on which hung the fullness of love. This is the paschal mystery of suffering, death and resurrection and we must feel that suffering and death before we recognize resurrection. The apostles could not assimilate all of this even after the risen Lord appears to them. This is so contrary to understanding suffering and death as the end. But all the suffering and tragedy in our world is overcome through the power of love. And so we live in hope. We refuse to despair.

God is always with us in every aspect of our life. We look for hope by looking for God in our experience. What is going on around us can tell us what God is saying to you.

God shares our humanity with us. We share our humanity with each other. It is our humanity that is wounded. We recover by following Jesus who loved, honestly and to the very end. This love opened the door to a new day in our human history. And it can still do it, when and if only you, and me, don't stop loving – like he did. In Jesus love is stronger than death, not only for him but for me and you also.

Talk to Jesus. Today is the day. It is here that a living hope takes its roots – from the tomb sealed with a heavy stone. For even there, at the edge of humanity, he continued to love. He never stopped. He never will. Maybe we shouldn't either. This is solid ground for our hope in the time of uncertainties, here, today, at the edge of humanity.

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