

## Homily – March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Good Friday



Your former pastor, Jeff Doucette, and I used to call Good Friday—facetiously, I might add—the great Catholic guilt day. We weren't totally wrong as guilt often fills people when they hear that Passion reading we just heard. Even though none of us were personally there 2000 years ago

yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" we, nonetheless, feel at least a twinge of guilt for not being the best version of ourselves here and now. We see and hear about God's great love on full display, and we inwardly say, "I know I can do better." The problem with guilt, as a motivation to do better, is that it usually doesn't last. Five minutes after the guilt passes, we're back to being our old selves again. A change of heart, true conversion, which we all need, cannot be achieved through the world of guilt.

We heard in last Sunday's Passion reading that Judas scolds a woman for anointing Jesus with expensive ointment. "The money," Judas says, "could have been used to help the poor." Yet, what does Judas do with the money in his pocket? He uses it not to help the poor, but to betray Jesus. Out of guilt, he hangs himself.

The Passion reading today ends with Nicodemus bringing 100 lbs. of myrrh and aloes to embalm Jesus' dead body. Nicodemus is expressing his guilt by bringing way more myrrh and aloe than was needed or desired. This gesture of Nicodemus reminds me of so many funerals I've presided at where a parent has died. The misguided children--out of guilt for not doing enough for their parent--adorn the casket or the funeral home with way more flowers than was needed or desired. Guilt doesn't change anything in the long run.

It's only love, and I might add only love that is willing to sacrifice, that has the power to change any of us.

If we weren't convinced before, the Cross should tell us clearly that Jesus' love was not only a love that included sacrifice, but it was a love without compromise. When I say Jesus would not compromise in the world of love, it has nothing to do with simply being stubborn. (Stubbornness is self-serving). It has everything to do with being faithful. God did not will his Son's death, and Jesus did not seek death in the hopes of being admired as a hero or a martyr.

God's only desire was that his Son would be a channel of love, mercy, forgiveness, peace and unity to the world. And Jesus' only desire was to be faithful to that mission. Jesus never once compromised the mission his Father had given him. If it meant suffering and dying, so be it. Jesus' death was his final great act of love and faithfulness to both God and us. He stopped talking about the greatest commandment and just did it: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbour as yourself. This is the love Jesus never compromised. In the world of compromise, we are always willing to break it with God, with our neighbour, or with ourselves. In Jesus' world, although he is tempted and tested, like no other human being, he never breaks it with God. He never curses God for leaving him in this mess. He never breaks it with neighbour but loves us to the end. And there is no war going on inside of him; he has learned to love the "self," the entire package that he is. Another word for this is integrity.

After 2000 years, I wonder how much we have truly understood the message of the Cross. For Jesus, holiness isn't about pushing away or separating himself from what we deem as evil or ungodly. Just avoid sin, push it away, and your little, pure soul will fly up to heaven someday. Nothing and no one is pushed away ever for Jesus, even and especially on that first Good Friday.

Jesus commanded us to "be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect?" What did he mean by that, and how can we achieve such perfection? I don't think he meant that we are to push away or expel dimensions of ourself or of the world that we don't like. The Pharisees, in Jesus' time, thought they could attain perfection by simply following purity codes. Fr. Richard Rohr has another suggestion of what being perfect can mean. He says we achieve perfection, if it can be achieved, by forgiving and accepting our imperfection. That's the only perfection we'll know on this side of heaven. If we cannot forgive and integrate (include) our imperfection, we'll never be able to love others with their imperfections. If we can't learn to forgive and include our imperfections, we'll soon return to the only world we

know, the world of guilt. Swallowing our guilt, we'll either give up hope like Judas, or we'll learn to carry 100 lbs. of myrrh and aloes on our backs like Nicodemus.

Don't ever hate anything about yourself that you feel is far from the perfection of Jesus' perfect love on the Cross. Don't hate or push away anything in yourself; Jesus doesn't. Jesus expels and excludes nothing and no one. Instead, he transforms and integrates. He isn't able to do it because he was born with some power from on high that we don't have. Just the opposite. He emptied himself, became a slave, and never compromised in giving us God's love even when that love was rejected.

Occasionally, we are given glimpses of God's uncompromising love. In April 1941, a German patrol officer named Joseph Schultz was sent to Yugoslavia shortly after Germany invaded it. Shultz was one of eight soldiers who were chosen to go on a routine patrol. They hitched up their rifles, came over a hill, and still did not know what their mission was about. On the brow of the hill stood eight Yugoslavians, five men and three women. It was only when these soldiers got within fifty feet of them did they realize what their mission was.

The eight soldiers were lined up. The sergeant barked out, "Ready!" and they lifted their rifles. "Aim," and they fixed their sights. And suddenly, in the brief silence that prevailed, there was the thud of a single rifle butt against the ground. Everybody stopped and looked. Private Joseph Schultz walked toward the Yugoslavians. His sergeant called after him and ordered him to come back, but he pretended not to hear him. Instead, he walked 50 feet to the mound on the hill, and he joined hands with the eight Yugoslavians. There was a moment of silence then the sergeant yelled, "Fire!" And Private Joseph Schultz died, mingling his blood with those innocent men and women. Later found on his body was an excerpt from St. Paul, "Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always endures no matter what" (1Cor. 13:6-7).

Without a tinge of guilt, let us come to the Cross today with only gratitude for Jesus' love that never compromised but always remained faithful to God and to us.

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