

Homily 2020.04.10 (Fri). Year A2. Good Friday.

Is 52:13-53:12; Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9; Jn 18:1-19:42.

‘If only we could go back to the good old days.’

In times of duress, with no immediate prospect of escape, we may unwittingly fall into nostalgia. As the present agony becomes excessively burdensome, it’s easy to convince ourselves that life used to be better in the past. Oddly, the truth of this claim isn’t quite as important as our desperate yearning for remedy. This explains why the fictional concept of time travel is so enticing. Honestly, who’s never wished they could change the present by altering the past? Wouldn’t you, for instance, undo the current coronavirus pandemic if it was possible? Suffice it to say, no creature is naturally drawn to pain, so our instinct would be to somehow reverse the effects of suffering. Likewise, at least some of Jesus’ disciples and supporters may have harboured a similar sentiment, as they witnessed his Passion, Crucifixion and Death.

It would be disheartening enough that an innocent man should be punished unjustly. Imagine then how unspeakably devastating it was for those who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ. Peter’s horror exemplified it, when he professed his master’s true identity, only to be told about Calvary (Mt 16:21-23). The apostle couldn’t hide his revulsion as he protested, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But what else could Peter do? Is death not the greatest scandal for man? Therefore, humanly speaking, can we not sympathise with man’s outrage at his Saviour’s death? Yet to the Son of God, it would be a far worse scandal for man to disregard the divine will, that doing so would constitute the way of satan.

Although Peter acted in goodwill, it was not only lacking, but in fact at odds with God. So how do we make sense of this unintended chasm? Let’s examine Peter’s words of exhortation at the beginning of his epistle: “By [God’s] great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and

unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 3-4). Does this sound like the same man who once tried to separate Jesus from his Cross? Not at all, because he’s now confident about an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. At last, he minds the things of God rather than the things of men, because he’s been thoroughly transformed by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Thankfully for us, the key to this transcendental perspective is already contained in our profession of faith: “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.” Subsequently, through his holy Cross, the death of God’s only-Begotten Son is not a recurring nightmare, but an enduring memory of sin’s defeat. And being in communion with Christ, death is no longer a scandal but our entry into eternal life, by virtue of the same faith which daringly calls this day ‘Good’ Friday.

In our current locked-down, social entombment experience, we desperately long for normalcy, to return to the way things were. But if we genuinely offer this ordeal as a participation in Jesus’ Passion, can we not hope for more than just ‘back to normal’? Must we be content with mere relief from suffering, when the Lord offers the Resurrection for those who gladly carry their own crosses and follow him? It’s evident that God doesn’t do nostalgia, because there’s no point in going back, when a superior reward is still to come. He desires that we have faith in the risen Christ, rather than the pre-Crucifixion Christ. For Jesus’ disciples, life is not a struggle for worldly survival, but an unwavering hope in the unfathomable gifts of heaven. Therefore, we can remain happy in the Lord, even as there are more reasons to weep. Like St. Peter after his witness of Jesus’ bodily Resurrection, we now place our hope, not in the mediocrity of mere survival, but in the supreme triumph of goodness over evil, and life over death.

On this day some two thousand years ago, our Lord and Saviour died. His lifeless body entered the tomb and was completely cut off from the world for a while. In this time of tribulation, we likewise suffer the pain of separation and isolation. Yet just as the Lord was raised after three long days, we also wait patiently in faith, preparing for the resurrection, which shall be our reward if we embrace this cross.