

THE GOOD FRIDAY OF EVERY DAY

Mario J. Paredes

4/15/2022

Few are the men who take risks and who risk themselves for others. As the poem says: Few are those who *“flee from the noise of our world and follow the hidden path. Where they have gone, the few wise men of our world have been.”* (Fray Luis de León). This is because we are accustomed to protecting and caring for ourselves in a frenzy of selfishness and narcissistic hedonism. For this reason, the few men and women who go against the current, who leave the mold, those who understand life as a gift to serve others, make such an impact. Jesus of Nazareth was one of these people.

Holy Week is also called the “Semana Mayor,” the most important week of the year by Catholic Christians. Within Holy Week, three days stand out: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night, known as the “Easter Triduum.” I want to refer in this article to the meaning that this has, not only for Catholics or believers in Christ but for all humanity, the annual commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ on “Good Friday.”

In a world of inconsistencies between what is said and what is done, the figure of Jesus of Nazareth stands out authoritatively and draws attention, even today, dividing history into two parts, with his absolute transparency and consistency between his life and his preaching, through his deeds and with his words, between what he announced and denounced. He faced his death on the cross to the very end.

Passion and death were the fruit of his choices; all of them originating in his acknowledgment of God as Father and of all men as brothers, and, also, from his absolute certainty that happiness and the meaning of human life are achieved, not in the search for the power to crush and trample or in seeking one’s comfort and pleasure, or in the accumulation of material goods, but, rather, in the generous giving of life in love, forgiveness, service, and solidarity with all, especially among those most in need: whoever selfishly guards and squanders his life loses it, but whoever spends it in love and service to others gains it forever. (Cf. Mk 8:35)

That is why the Christian life, the life of those who, two thousand years later, confess Jesus, the Christ, as their “*way, truth, and life*” (Jn 14:6) and who follow him as his disciples, is above all a way of life: the same life that He lived and that follows a logic that does not coincide with and instead contradicts the logic of the world: Because “*you are in the world, but you are not of the world*” (Jn 17:15). In this clash of criteria—between the world and the gospel of Jesus—persecutions are born and with the persecutions, the cross: “*Whoever wants to follow me must take up his cross...*” (Mt 16:24); the same cross that He faced with complete authenticity, courage, and fidelity to his convictions and his commitments to God: “*Do not make my Father’s House into a den of thieves*” (Mt 21:12); his commitments with man: “*Because the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath*” (Mk 2:27); with the truth: “*For this I was born... to testify to the Truth*” (Jn 18:37); with freedom: “*Woe to you hypocritical Pharisees*” (Mt 23:13), “*When he saw that they wanted to proclaim him king, he fled*” (Jn 6:1), “*Go and tell that fox that I continue on my way*” (Lk 13:32); with justice: “*I want to give the same to the last as to the first*” (Mt 20:13) and fraternity: “*There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends*” (Jn 15:13). For all these reasons, his preaching was rejected (“*No prophet is accepted in his own native land*”) (Lk 4:24). He was sentenced to death as a blasphemer and a false prophet, and he experienced the profound crisis of his sufferings and his death on the cross—as a free gift and a total surrender: “*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*” (Lk 23:46)

The life of Jesus, like that of no other person in history, is marked by contrasts, by the disconcerting, by paradoxes, as a permanent “*sign of contradiction*” (Lk 2:34):

- From his birth, he is adored by some while others sought to kill him.
- During his public ministry: he is accepted by sinners and rejected by those who appear to be righteous, followed by the people and persecuted by the authorities. He is loved and followed to martyrdom or hated to the point that he is crucified.
- Through his life, through his actions and words, through his Gospel, he offers a plan, a saving initiative of God that is rejected almost without being heard or understood by men.
- To follow him, he requires one to deny himself. He proclaims happy and blessed those despised by the world and teaches that to be great, the first must become last and the servant of all, loving those who do us harm and turning the other cheek.
- He makes known and makes present the sovereignty of God, not through violence, force, or the power of arms, but through love, mercy, forgiveness, and his life’s work, for which he is accompanied and helped by anonymous, humble fishermen.



Mario J. Paredes
Chief Executive Officer
mparedes@somoscommunitycare.org
646.979.7613

As has been said, his life and uninterrupted sequence of paradoxes reach their maximum expression in the events that we remember during Holy Week. Now, we can mark this annual commemoration as a walk through a museum of antiquities, a memory, and lamentation for unjust events that occurred in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, without implying, affecting, or transforming our present.

But there is an authentic way to commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of the Nazarene and, more than that, to make his life's work more valid and current today. This consists of remembering what happened in the *past* to Jesus, the person, but—at the same time and in that light—to review, challenge, question, and renew our entire *present*, to build a better *future*.

Because all the events that happened to Jesus, the person, repeat today and shed light on the lives of those who are capable of washing the feet of their brothers and of building fraternity by breaking and sharing bread or in the death sentences and the unjust deaths of so many innocents. Because that Friday, two thousand years ago, continues impacting our lives today in the sufferings of those who commit themselves to carry their own crosses and those of others, and in the lives of the Cyrenians and Veronicas who lighten the lives of others. Because the falls experienced by Jesus, on his way to Calvary, clarify our falls and because, his nudity, illuminates the lives of the millions of dispossessed in a thousand ways in the world.

Today, although we have become accustomed to a thousand forms of suffering and death, we are called to build a world in which the perfection of man is found in the new commandment of love, according to the ideals, values, and criteria of “*He who was crucified by his hanging from a tree*” (Acts 5:30).

Mario J. Paredes is the Executive President of SOMOS Community Care, a network of 2,500 independent doctors—mostly primary care doctors—who attend to approximately one million Medicaid patients of limited resources in New York City.