

“There was in Him no stately bearing to make us look at Him, nor appearance that would attract us to Him. He was rejected and avoided by people, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held Him in no esteem.” – *Isaiah 53:2–3*

Before our liturgy began, we watched a video—a series of images, many taken from *The Passion of the Christ*. They were horrifying, disturbing, and hard to watch. Even now, many of us still struggle to look at Jesus in that moment of suffering. Some are afraid that the images of blood and torn and pierced flesh might leave lasting trauma.

But my friends, what we saw was already foretold by the prophet Isaiah in our first reading: there would be nothing in His appearance to draw us to Him. He would be rejected and avoided—people would turn their faces away. And even today, we the Parishioners of St Ann still hide our eyes from the reality of the brutality of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Crucifixion, in the time of Jesus, was not merely execution. It was the most degrading, humiliating, and excruciating form of death. First used by the Persians and Carthaginians, it was later perfected by the Romans as a public spectacle of shame. The condemned were stripped in public, flogged, mocked as they carried the very wood that would bring about their death, and then nailed to a cross—hung naked, in agony, exposed to the burning heat of the day, the cold of the night, and the cruelty of passersby. Sometimes, they suffered for days before death finally came.

Jesus Christ came into this world, to reveal God to us as a human. How God feels, how God thinks and what he desires for us. But in

His Passion, He also revealed something else: through His wounds, through His disfigured and ugly body, Jesus reveals to the world the ugliness of sin. Isaiah says we turned our faces from Him—because His bruised and bloody appearance reflects something we would rather not see: *our own sinfulness*. My sins, Your sins, *Our* sins that disfigured and killed the begotten Son of God, the only Son of Mary.

There is a scene in the movie *The Passion of the Christ* when Simon of Cyrene is forced to help Jesus carry the cross. As he is pulled into the crowd, he shouts, “Remember, I am an innocent man, forced to carry the cross of a condemned one.” “*I am an innocent man, forced*”, “*innocents*”. Simon was right—he was not the one condemned.

Like Simon, none of us likes to be falsely accused. We fear it would ruin our reputation, our lives, our families. We try hard to appear innocent before others—and even before ourselves. And we say to ourselves, its ok, I am just human. I’ll try again. But deep down, we know the truth: we have sinned; we are all guilty of something, something we did, or said or thought off, but we haven’t been caught yet.

But God sees all things. And today, through the terrible suffering of His Son, God shines a light into the dark corners of our lives—those places we try to keep hidden. And He says: *You are guilty. I am guilty. We are the condemned ones.*

The consequence of sin, as Scripture tells us from the very beginning, is death—eternal separation from God.

But God, in His mercy, knew we could not bear that punishment alone. Without Him, we would be lost—cut off from life itself and doomed to cease existing in the fullness we were created for.

Yet because God is just, every sin committed against Him must be

accounted for. So, in love, He sent His Son to take our place.

Jesus bore the full weight of every sin—from every human heart, in every age: past, present, and future. Every sin we have committed since the moment we came into this world—every sin of today and every sin yet to come—was laid upon Him.

He did not suffer only spiritually. He suffered mentally, emotionally, and physically. On that Cross, the full force of Hell descended upon Him, and He was plunged into complete abandonment—into God-forsakenness—into the very depths of Hell itself.

My friends, that is why we've gathered this evening—to venerate the Cross with hearts overwhelmed by gratitude. Because Jesus carried it all—our suffering, our shame, our sins—on that Cross.

You might ask: Why must suffering be the path to our salvation? Couldn't God have chosen a different way?

It's a deep and existential question—and yet, the answer lies in the mystery of who God is.

1 John 4:8 and 4:16 tell us that “God is love.” This means that love is not just one of God's many attributes—it is the very core of who He is. Everything God does flows from this divine love. And love—if it is real—must be willing to suffer. Not because God delights in pain, but because authentic love proves itself in suffering for the sake of the beloved.

So, when someone says, “I love you,” the deeper question must be: *Do they love you for how you make them feel—or enough to suffer and die for you?*

True love is tested, purified, and perfected through suffering. Without love, suffering is unbearable. Without suffering, love is merely a word that evokes warm and fuzzy feelings which quickly

fade. What proves love to be real? What authenticates it? *Suffering*. And when suffering is embraced for the sake of love, it becomes a **sacrifice**—and from that sacrifice flows **forgiveness of sins, healing of brokenness, and renewal of the old into a new creation**.

It's no coincidence that in John's Gospel, the Passion of Jesus begins in a garden—and ends in a garden, with the new tomb. The first garden we hear of in Scripture is the Garden of Eden. There, humanity fell. But in this second garden, Jesus, the new Adam, lies in the tomb. From His side, the Church—the Bride of the New Adam—is born. God plants a new Eden. In Christ, our fallen world is made new.

So, let us meditate: *How have I turned my face away from the suffering Christ?*

- When do I ignore the needs of my family or fail to spend time with them?
- When do I turn away from the needs of the poor, the homeless and migrants?
- When I turn away from those who are lonely, the sick?
- When I look away from the suffering in our world—war, poverty, sickness, injustice?
- When do I focus on my own comfort and ignore my neighbors who are struggling?
- When I excuse or hide my sins out of pride, thinking I don't need forgiveness?

And like Simon of Cyrene, have I refused to admit that I, too, am guilty in God's eyes?

But what if, like the thief on the cross in Luke's gospel, I could accept my sinfulness and the just consequences of my actions—and still turn to Christ for help? What if, instead of running from the Cross, I embrace it and bring my shame and guilt—not to despair—but to Jesus on the Cross?

Do not be afraid to come to Him. In the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation, Christ meets you. He forgives you. He heals you. He carries your cross with you.

Like the thief beside Him, Jesus suffers next to us. We are not alone. He longs to save us for that is the reason He chose to die in the first place.

Soon, we will come forward to venerate the Cross. As you approach, come with gratitude in your heart. Thank Him—for taking your place. In His suffering, we see both the ugliness of sin and the breathtaking beauty of God's love and mercy.

My friends, when we truly seek His forgiveness and healing, something powerful happens.

- We who were broken—are made whole.
- We who were scarred—are made new.
- We who were naked and shamed—are now clothed in His love.

And just as God looked upon creation in the beginning and said, "It is good," so now, gazing upon you—redeemed by Christ—He says:

"My child, you are good. You are beautiful. You are fiercely loved."

That, my friends, is what makes this Friday *Good*.