

Good Friday

April 14, 2006

Is 52:13—53:12

Ps 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25

Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Jn 18:1—19:42

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I once heard it said on a Good Friday by a minister,
something shocking and startling: He said:
“Today my brothers and sisters is Good Friday,
and there ain’t nothing good about Good Friday.

It is now the center of the Triduum,
the great three days of the Church.
We gather with the taste of yesterday’s feast still in our mouths:
the feast of love, self-giving love,
the feast served from a table decked in white,
the meal shared in the midst of time honored traditions
and images of foot washing and service.
We gather remember the meal of the past day, yet hungry for more.
It is as if yesterday was but an appetizer. We long for more, the main course to feed us.

Hungry in our deepest parts we gather before now a stripped and vacant table.
Nothing adorns this place except emptiness.
All that is present is now absent.
The white vestments of the last day have been stocked away
for another day, and red, darkness,
and nothingness now find their home in this place of many memories
of a God who has bestowed many a blessing.
It is to this place now, we come hungry.
We need to be fed. But with what now?
All is seemingly lost.
We have a passion to be filled.
Our very beings grumble for nourishment.

All the places we look in this place for nourishment lead us to look for something more.
The table, nothing, a candle lit, but snuffed out,
a thunderous organ to replace the quiet of this day, but to avail.
All we have is a cross, a word,
a word that describes the menu for this center day in the great liturgy of the Church.
We listen to hear what will nourish us and
give us the strength for the coming still better days.

The word is hard to chew. It is the harshest of all realities.
It is the deepest of all our fears, no, not necessarily the lack of nourishment,
but the darkest of all of faiths night: DEATH!
The word spoken is death. That is our feast.
That is our meal digested into our deepest hungers of the day.
Death is set upon this table.
What is there to be called Good about this Good Friday?

The prophet of Isaiah speaks well of the meal upon which we feast.
He serves for us images to feed us this day,
the image of one "shall prosper, shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.
Suddenly and slowly we are making contact with something to nourish us.

But this one is not beautiful to the world's eyes.
"His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance."
We know this for we have seen the ugliness of a creation once called good now marred.

"He was despised and rejected" not only by those who stood by the rugged,
bloody cross, but by us here assembled now.
In the painful parts of our lives there are scars that speak of this truth.
We come sharing a world where people are despised
and rejected because of the color of their skin, the language of their people,
the status of their parents, or some other difference that is labeled as significant.
Differences of ideologies, gender, left, right, gay, straight, the have and the have nots!
We know rejection, being despised and marred by some.
We know suffering, but not unto itself, a suffering that leads to new life and redemption.
We come here to now embrace the cross not only for our own suffering,
But the suffering we inflict upon our world, subtle, but still real!

The prophet Isaiah tells of the meal upon which we feast this day.
He was "stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" by those just like us,
who should have known better.
It is a dark and painful question that occasionally sneaks out of our mouths, but is so ever
present in our souls. How can there be a God if....? Where is God?
How can God allow this or that to happen? Affliction is tragic.
We know on this Friday we call Good,
we have reasons and great need to embrace this cross.
We feast today on the One who holds all of the wounded,
the marred and apparently ugly,
in His wounded and outstretched arms.
We feast today on a feast of death, a feast of emptiness,
a feast of seemingly nothingness, but not for too much longer.
We recall and cleave to that paradoxical faith reality,
that in our weakness power reaches perfection!
That is why we call this day Good!

So it is.

The central day in our great liturgy of the Church is indeed a feast day,
a feast of death, the death of Jesus.

Come and share the feast. For it is an ironic truth,
but a truth to be sure, that yes, my friends it is Good Friday,
the celebration of the Lord's Passion and death, and
there is much Good about Good Friday!

We will have to *wait and see!*