

Good Friday 2008

Some of us have heard of an explanation of the crucifixion that goes like this:

“God was very angry with us for our sins, and because he is a just God, our sin had to be punished. But instead of punishing us he sent his Son, Jesus, as a substitute to suffer and die in our place. The blood of Jesus paid the price of our sins, and because of him God stopped being angry with us. In other words, Jesus took the rap, and we got forgiven, provided we said we believed in him” (from a radio talk by Rev. Jeffrey John).

Fr. John went on to say, “Well, I don’t know about you, but even at the age of ten I thought this explanation was pretty repulsive as well as nonsensical. What sort of God was this, getting so angry with the world and the people he created, and then, to calm himself down, demanding the blood of his own Son? And anyway, why should God forgive us through punishing somebody else? It was worse than illogical, it was insane. It made God sound like a psychopath. If any human being behaved like this we’d say they were a monster.”

Many today teach of atonement for sin that was accomplished by God substituting Jesus for us. I understand why many accept this theology of Christ. I used to believe this myself. I have difficulty with God taking out his wrath on Jesus when he loves Him. It seems so contradictory. I prefer to believe that God so loved me that “He sent his one and only son that whosoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). By believing in him I know my death is not in vain. By believing in him I know that my life will continue because he has the power to overcome death.

It is difficult for us to accept that Christ came into this world to experience everything we did. Westerners have a problem with suffering. People sometimes wonder aloud how a good God can allow suffering. The truth is that a good God knew the reality of

suffering and came to share it, came to experience it. That is what makes this Friday good. It is about God's goodness in that he participated fully in our life. That Life is suffering was one of the teachings of the Buddha. Yet the Buddha also taught that suffering is evil. Both Buddha and Jesus taught that by entering into suffering evil can be overcome in this life and in the next. I think that it is something that has to be accepted and acknowledged to be the truth before we can make much progress in the spiritual life.

The worst thing that can happen to anyone is that they be betrayed by a friend, falsely accused. Taken. Misunderstood. Tried on trumped up charges and killed slowly, unjustly and despicably.

What does a good God know about the suffering that you and I know is part of life.

Every last thing there is to know. Amen