

Behold the Man of Sorrows Good Friday 2009

Despised, rejected, crushed, suffered, punishment, oppressed, afflicted, anguish, silent, scorned, wretched, tested, flogged, crucified, thirsty, divided, perfect, loved, bowed, and finished. These words in our readings attempt to describe our Savior's death on this day we call Good Friday.

It's difficult to put His death into words; these seem shallow when read with just our eyes. They endeavor to testify of the Jesus who took upon himself human sorrows. For almost 2000 years Christians have tried to understand Christ's suffering and the cross. Each year I am sure we go away somewhat empty; not fully understanding the gravity of it all. That's why we keep coming back; so that we might learn to "read" the words with our hearts.

There is so much more to comprehend. St. Paul prayed in Ephesians chapter three that the church might be able to understand what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. We can never grasp the depth of that love. While many a soldier has laid down his or her life for another soldier, never has anyone taken on the sins of his comrade.

All that can be done is to stand under the cross and look up. Only by looking through the eyes of faith can we receive a small portion of what the cross holds for those who look up to it. As we look today, I invite all of us to look past the wood. May we look past the body nailed to it. See that His suffering is now finished and His death is accomplished. The body He left behind is not important, for it has died and the weight of justice it has contained.

No, we look to the cross for something more precious, more enduring than that body that suffered. Instead, we could look for the person that Jesus is. We seek to know the love that endured such shame yet was not broken by it. When we come to venerate the cross shortly, we give honor to the One to whom we pale in comparison -- to His courage, to His truth, to His mercy, to His kindness, to His strength and power to bless instead of curse this world and its offspring.

We look to Him whose flame was snuffed out by the cross. The world is hushed and silent now in His absence. The thirst of the evil against Him is quenched. Look up to His cross, kiss the feet that it held in place, bow in reverence to the holy of holies that moved upon the face of the earth and ask that we might be made worthy of His holiness. The fire once seen in the man Jesus, though cold, will come alive greater than before. We clutch at our breast as we go by that cross and we might bow our heads and wonder at the words of "How Great Thou Art, How Great Thou Art!"

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,

He bled and died to take away my sin:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee:
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

A secret disciple of Jesus, who kept silent because of his fear, took down the body, that heavy body that begged to be buried. From that day forward Joseph of Arimathea would no longer be a secret follower. No, once the body is touched and held, one can never be the same. My people.... hold Him that endured so much.... that in that sweet embrace the work of the cross might become for us the means of our salvation. Amen.