

A HOMILY FOR GOOD FRIDAY CONCERNING THE DEATH AND PASSION OF OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Beloved in Christ, it would not be suitable for us, having been redeemed from the devil, from sin and death, and from everlasting damnation, to let this day pass without meditating upon the excellent work of our redemption accomplished on that first Good Friday through the great mercy and love of our Savior Jesus Christ for us, even though we were wretched sinners and His mortal enemies. If we would take care to remember what a mortal man has done for the benefit of his country, how much more should we remember the benefit of Christ's death, through which He has purchased the sure pardon and forgiveness of our sins, and through which He made us to be at one with our Father in heaven, who has accepted us as not only His loving children, but also with His only Son Jesus Christ,¹ fellow heirs of the kingdom of heaven!

Christ's kindness appears even greater to us when we consider that it pleased Him to divest Himself of all the godly honor that He held equally with His Father in heaven, and to come down into this vale of misery to be made a mortal man. Furthermore, He came in the state of a lowly servant,² serving us for our profit, even though we were His sworn enemies who had renounced His holy law and followed the lusts and sinful pleasures of our corrupt nature. Despite all this, Christ put Himself between God's deserved wrath and our sin, to expunge the charge that was against us,³ by which we were in danger to God. He paid our debt, a debt so great that we could never pay it, and without payment God the Father could never be at one with us. It was not possible for us to be set free from this debt by our own ability. Therefore, Christ was pleased to pay it, completely settling our account.

Who could even consider the grievous debt of sin that could not be paid except by the death of an innocent, without hating sin in his heart? If God hates sin so much that neither man nor angel could pay the price of redemption—only the death of His only and well-beloved Son—who will not stand in fear of sin? If we, my friends, consider that for our sins this most innocent Lamb was driven to death, we shall have much more cause to grieve that we were the cause of His death than to cry out of the malice and cruelty of the Jews who were there that day to pursue Him to His death. We did the deeds for which He was stricken and wounded: they were only the ministers of our wickedness.

It is appropriate, then, for us to thoroughly examine our hearts and mourn our own wickedness and sinful living. If the most dearly beloved Son of God was stricken for sins He did not commit, how much more ought we to be punished for the manifold sins which we commit against God daily, if we do not earnestly repent, and if we are not sorry for them! No man can love sin, which God hates so much, and be in God's favor. No man can say that he truly loves Christ while maintaining friendship with sin, which is Christ's great enemy and the author of His death. Our love for God and Christ is equal to our

¹ Romans 8:17

² Philippians 2:6-7

³ Colossians 2:14

hatred for sin. Therefore, we should take care not to favor sin, or else we will be found enemies to God and traitors to Christ. For those who nailed Christ to the cross are not His only tormentors and crucifiers; rather, everyone who commits immorality and sin (which brought Him to His death) crucifies again the Son of God.⁴

If the wages of sin is death⁵ and death is everlasting, surely it is no small danger to be in service of sin. If we live according to the flesh and the sinful lusts thereof, we shall surely die, as Almighty God warns us through the words of St. Paul.⁶ The only way we can live to God is to die to sin.⁷ As St. Paul says,

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.⁸

But, if sin rules and reigns in us, then God, who is the fountain of all grace and virtue, has departed from us; then the devil and his ungracious spirit has dominion over us. And surely, if we die in such a miserable state, we shall not rise to life, but fall down to eternal death and damnation.

For Christ has not redeemed us from sin so that we may safely return to it again; instead, He has redeemed us so that we should forsake every sinful deed and live in righteousness.⁹ We are therefore washed in our baptism from the filthiness of sin that we should live thereafter in purity of life. In baptism we promised to renounce the devil and his influence, and we promised to be, as obedient children,¹⁰ always following God's will and pleasure. Then, if He is truly our Father, let us give Him His due honor.¹¹ If we are His children, let us freely show Him our obedience, just as Christ openly declared His obedience to His Father, for as St. Paul writes, Christ was obedient even to the very death, the death of the cross.¹² And He did this for all who believe in Him. Jesus Christ was not punished for any sins of His own, for He was pure and undefiled by any sin. He was wounded, says Isaiah, for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.¹³ He suffered the penalty of them Himself, to deliver us from danger. Isaiah says that He bore all our sores and infirmities upon His own back: no pain did He refuse to suffer in His own body so that He might deliver us from pain everlasting. It was His pleasure to do this for us: we did not deserve it.

⁴ Hebrews 6:6

⁵ Romans 6:23

⁶ Romans 8:13

⁷ Romans 6:11

⁸ Romans 8:10-11

⁹ Titus 2:14

¹⁰ I Peter 1:14

¹¹ Malachi 1:6

¹² Philippians 2:8

¹³ Isaiah 53:4-5

As a result, the more we see ourselves bound to God, the more we ought to thank Him and the more hope we have that we shall receive all other good things of His hand, in that we have received the gift of His only Son through His liberality. For as St. Paul says, He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?¹⁴ If we need any thing either for body or soul, we may lawfully and boldly approach God as our merciful Father, to ask what we desire, and we shall obtain it. For such power is given us to be the children of God, to as many as believe in Christ's name.¹⁵ Whatever we ask in His name will be granted. For Almighty God the Father is so well pleased with Christ His Son that for His sake He favors us and will deny us nothing. This sacrifice and oblation of His Son's death, which He so obediently and innocently suffered, was so pleasing to God that He was willing to take it for the only and full amends for all the sins of the world. And such favor did Christ purchase by His death from His heavenly Father for us that for the merit thereof (if we are true Christians indeed, and not in word only) we are now fully in God's grace again, and clearly discharged from our sin.

Surely no tongue is able to express the worthiness of so precious a death! For in this stands the continual pardon of our daily offenses, in this rests our justification, in this we are accepted, in this is purchased the everlasting health of all our souls; indeed, there is nothing else that can be named under heaven to save our souls¹⁶ except for this work of Christ's precious offering of His body upon the altar of the cross. Certainly no work of any mortal man, no matter how holy, can be added to the merits of Christ's most holy act. For no doubt all our thoughts and deeds were of no value, if they were not allowed in the merits of Christ's death. All our righteousness is far imperfect when compared with Christ's righteousness. For in His acts and deeds there was no spot of sin or any imperfection (which is why they could be the true amends of our unrighteousness), whereas our acts and deeds are full of imperfection and infirmities, and therefore nothing worthy of themselves to stir God to any favor, much less to challenge the glory that is due to Christ's act and merit: for "Not to us," says David, "Not to us, but to thy Name give the glory, O Lord."¹⁷

Let us therefore, good friends, glorify His Name with all reverence; let us magnify and praise Him forever. For He has dealt with us according to His great mercy; by Himself He has purchased our redemption. He did not spare Himself and send an angel to do this deed. Instead, He did it Himself so that He might do it the better, and make it the more perfect redemption.¹⁸ Not even the intolerable pains that He suffered in the whole course of His long passion could turn Him from His purpose of doing good to His enemies, but He opened His heart for us, and gave Himself wholly to ransom us. Let us therefore now open our hearts again to Him, and study in our lives to be thankful to such a Lord, and always to be mindful of so great a benefit.

¹⁴ Romans 8:32

¹⁵ John 1:12

¹⁶ Acts 4:12

¹⁷ Psalm 115:1

¹⁸ Hebrews 1:3

In fact, let us take up our cross with Christ, and follow Him. His passion is not only the ransom and whole amends for our sin, but it is also a most perfect example of all patience and endurance. For, if Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead,¹⁹ how should it not be appropriate for us to bear patiently our small crosses of adversity and the troubles of this world? For surely, as St. Peter says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.”²⁰ And, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.^{21, 22} Not that the sufferings of this life are worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,²³ but we should gladly be content to suffer, to be like Christ in our life, so that by our works we may glorify our Father in heaven.²⁴ And, even though it is painful and grievous to bear the cross of Christ in the sorrows and unhappiness of this life, doing so brings forth the joyful fruit of hope in all who endure this discipline.²⁵ Let us not focus on the pain so much as the reward that shall follow that labor.²⁶ Rather, let us strive in our suffering to endure innocently and guiltlessly, as our Savior Christ did. For, if we suffer for our own faults, then we would be expected to endure without complaint: “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?”²⁷ But, if we suffer loss of goods and life through no fault of our own, if we suffer to be evil spoken of, for the love of Christ, this is “commendable before God,”²⁸ for that is how Christ suffered.

He never sinned; neither was there any guile found in His mouth. Even when He was reviled with taunts, He reviled not again; when He was wrongfully dealt with, He threatened not again, nor revenged His quarrel, but delivered His cause to Him who judges rightly.

Perfect patience cares not what or how much it suffers, nor of whom it suffers, whether of friend or foe; but seeks to suffer innocently and without deserving. The one who possesses perfect charity cares so little for revenge that he studies how to return good for evil, to bless and say well of those who curse him, to pray for those who persecute him, according to the example of our Savior Christ, who is the most perfect example and pattern of all meekness and patience. For even while He was hanging upon the cross in most fervent anguish, bleeding in every part of His blessed body, being set in the midst of His enemies and crucifiers, who mocked and scorned Him despitefully without compassion, even though they saw how terribly He was suffering, Jesus Christ had towards them such compassion of heart that He prayed to His Father of heaven for them, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”²⁹ What patience He also showed when one of His own trusted Apostles and servants came to betray Him to His

¹⁹ Acts 17:3

²⁰ 1 Peter 2:21

²¹ 2 Timothy 2:12

²² Romans 8:17

²³ Romans 8:18

²⁴ Matthew 5:16

²⁵ Hebrews 12:11

²⁶ James 5:11

²⁷ 1 Peter 2:20

²⁸ 1 Peter 2:20

²⁹ Luke 23:34

enemies to the death! He said nothing worse to him than, “Friend, why have you come?”³⁰

Thus, good people, we should call to mind the great examples of charity which Christ showed in His passion, if we are to profit by remembering His passion. We should bear the same sort of charity and love to one another, if we want to be true servants of Christ. As He says, “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”³¹ We must be more perfect in our charity than this, even as our Father in heaven is perfect,³² who makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.³³ In this same way, we should show our charity impartially, as well to one as to another, as well to friend as foe, like obedient children,³⁴ after the example of our good Father in heaven. For, if Christ was obedient to His Father even to the death, and even to the most shameful death (as the Jews esteemed it), the death of the cross,³⁵ why should not we be obedient to God in lesser points of charity and patience?

Let us therefore forgive our neighbors their small faults, as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us our great faults.³⁶ It is not fitting that we should desire God to forgive our great offences while we refuse to forgive the small trespasses of our neighbors against us. We call for mercy in vain if we will not show mercy to our neighbors. For if we will not banish wrath and displeasure toward our Christian brother from our hearts, God will not forgive the displeasure and wrath that our sins have deserved of Him. For under this condition God forgives us: that we forgive others.³⁷ It is not suitable for Christian men to be hardhearted to one another or to think their neighbor unworthy to be forgiven. For no matter how unworthy your neighbor may be, Christ is worthy to have you do much for His sake: He has deserved it of you that you should forgive your neighbor. And God is also to be obeyed, who commands us to forgive, if we will have any part of the pardon which our Savior Christ purchased of God the Father by shedding His precious blood. Nothing becomes Christ’s servants so much as mercy and compassion.

Let us then be merciful to one another and pray one for another, that we may be healed from all frailties of our life,³⁸ that we may reduce the opportunities to offend one another and that we may be of one mind and one spirit, agreeing together in brotherly love and concord, as dear children of God. By these means we will move God to be merciful to us for our sins. Furthermore, such behavior will prepare us to receive our Savior and Maker in His blessed Sacrament to the everlasting comfort and health of our souls. Christ delights to enter and to dwell in that soul where love and charity rule, and where peace

³⁰ Matthew 26:50

³¹ Matthew 5:46-47

³² Matthew 5:45

³³ Matthew 5:48

³⁴ I Peter 5:14

³⁵ Philippians 2:8

³⁶ Ephesians 4:32

³⁷ Matthew 6:14–15

³⁸ James 5:16

and concord are seen. As St. John writes, “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”³⁹ And by this, he says, we shall know that we are of God, if we love our brothers.⁴⁰ Furthermore, by this shall we know that we have been delivered from death to life, if we love one another.⁴¹ But he who hates his brother, says the same Apostle, abides in death, even in the danger of everlasting death; and is moreover the child of damnation and of the devil, cursed of God, and hated (so long as he remains in hatred) by God and all His heavenly company. For just as peace and charity make us the blessed children of Almighty God, hatred and envy make us the cursed children of the devil.

May God give us all the grace to follow Christ’s example in peace and charity, in patience and endurance, so that we may have Him as our guest to enter and dwell within us. By this, we may have full assurance, having such a pledge of our salvation. If we have Him and His favor, we may be sure that we have the favor of God by His means. For He sits on the right hand of His Father as our advocate and attorney, pleading and interceding for us in all our needs and necessities.⁴² Therefore, if we lack any gift of godly wisdom, we may ask it of God for Christ’s sake, and we shall have it.

Let us examine ourselves to determine what we lack in the virtue of charity and patience. If we see that our hearts are not inclined to forgive those who have offended against us, then let us acknowledge our lack and pray that God will supply what is needed. But, if we lack this virtue and still see in ourselves no desire to have it, we are truly in a dangerous case before God and need to pray earnestly that God will change our hearts, grafting in a new one. For unless we forgive others, we shall never be forgiven of God. No, not all the prayers and merits that others may offer can pacify God’s wrath toward us, unless we are at peace and in unity with our neighbor: not all our deeds and good works can move God to forgive us our debts to Him unless we forgive others. He values mercy more than sacrifice.⁴³ Mercy moved our Savior Christ to suffer for His enemies; it is right for us to follow His example. For it will profit us little to meditate on the fruits and price of His passion, to magnify them, and to delight in them and trust them, if we do not also intend to follow His examples in passion. If we remember Christ’s death and will hold fast to it with faith for the merit of it, and will also frame ourselves so as to give ourselves and all that we have by charity for the good of our neighbor, as Christ spent Himself wholly for our profit, then we truly remember Christ’s death; and, being thus followers of His steps, we shall surely follow Him to where He sits now with the Father and the Holy Ghost, to whom be all honor and glory. Amen.

³⁹ I John 4:16

⁴⁰ John 13:35

⁴¹ I John 3:14

⁴² Romans 8:34

⁴³ Hosea 6:6