

**“Good Friday: the Blueprint for a Civilization of Truth, Beauty and Goodness”**  
**Homily for Good Friday**  
**April 2, 2021; St. Mary’s Cathedral**

**Introduction**

“Good Friday.” Even the very name connotes a certain somber sort of a feeling. We must admit it: the violence that marks the story of this day is unsettling to us. It is not like the silence of Holy Saturday, the day after our Lord’s death when the Church is in mourning. Today is sort of a jolting shock to the system, in which we once again relive our Lord’s violent death.

**Cancel Culture Nothing New**

The violence currently marking our own culture is likewise unsettling. This violence is sometimes carried out by protagonists of what social commentators refer to as the “cancel culture.” The online “Urban Dictionary” defines “cancel culture” as:

A modern internet phenomenon where a person is ejected from influence or fame by questionable actions. It is caused by a critical mass of people who are quick to judge and slow to question. It is commonly caused by an accusation, whether that accusation has merit or not. It is a direct result of the ignorance of people caused [by] communication technologies outpacing the growth in available knowledge of a person.\*

If anyone thought that cancel culture was a new phenomenon with our time, they can stand corrected. Is this not exactly the violence perpetrated on our Lord?

He was ejected from influence because he posed a threat to the worldly power of the governing authorities and the leaders of his own people. Yes, the people were quick to judge without thinking things through, even the scholars of the Law who should have known better. We see a growing mob mentality here that erupts in violence against an innocent man. This is the story on the human level.

However, this is also the same story we are seeing played out before our eyes today. What do the cancelers really want to cancel out? It is far more than those who disagree with them. The real activists are seeking to discredit the great protagonists of Western Civilization, both in the history of our country and of our Church. How else can one explain the toppling of statues of Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, who sacrificed so much to free slaves? And here locally we find ourselves having to defend the honor and legacy of St. J n pero Serra, who made heroic sacrifices to defend the indigenous people from his fellow Spaniards.

**The Building of a Christian Civilization**

We should not be na ve: the cancel culture wants to cancel out Western Civilization, which is another way of saying the Church. It is the Church that built Western Civilization, using truth, beauty and goodness to build a Christian world. The examples are too numerous to mention here. But just think about the great medieval cathedrals in Europe: all across the continent people visit buildings that are almost a millennium old because they still reduce the visitor to silence with their timeless beauty.

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\* <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Cancel%20Culture>.

The founding of the first universities and hospitals, the development of the scientific method of inquiry, and the building blocks of what developed into Western music theory are among just a few other examples. Not to mention the Church's commitment to serving the poor, and not just in the sense of giving from what one has left over to help someone else less fortunate. Entire religious orders were founded, and thrive to this day, to not only serve the poor but to actually be poor. Citizens with claims to wealth and nobility would divest themselves of such in order to be poor in service to the poor. We all should know that, since the most renowned of the many examples is our own patron saint, Francis of Assisi. And if that were not enough, also here in San Francisco we have a constant reminder in the abundant and blessed presence of Mother Teresa's Missionary of Charity sisters, the living legacy of Christian care for the poor.

This is the civilization, the Christian civilization, built by the Church founded by Jesus Christ. And today, on Good Friday, we see the whole blueprint for this plan of our Lord: his death on the Cross. "Pilate ... had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews' ... and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek." Here it is: the essence of the plan of Western Civilization, of the Church that would build a Christian civilization.

### **The Blueprint**

It begins with God's original Chosen People. God gave them the Law, the Torah, through Moses. Not just rules and regulations to help the people get along, but the revelation of His higher truth. From this people the Church was born, to whom God gave the fullness of revelation in His Son Jesus Christ. As the Church began to fulfill the Great Commission and proclaim the Gospel throughout the known world of the time, she came more and more into contact with Greek culture.

Greek thought and the Greek language were the predominating cultural influence in the world of the time. Greeks being the great philosophers that they were, the early Church fathers understood how to translate Semitic thought into categories of Greek philosophy in order to bring the Gentiles to salvation in Christ. And then, when Rome became Christian, the Church was able to avail herself of the physical and social infrastructure of the Roman Empire that had spread all throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Roads and law are what gave the Church that infrastructure she needed to build a common Christian community all throughout the world.

Jerusalem, Athens and Rome; Hebrew, Greek and Latin: these are the building blocks of a great Christian civilization. But it is all a façade if we do not look below the inscription. Pilate also said, "Behold, your king." Do we gaze upon Christ on the Cross, and truly behold our King, the one who gave everything for us, even though he had no need to receive anything from us? Jesus himself – not *only* his teaching, but he, in his death on the Cross – is the blueprint for a civilization of truth and love, a civilization imbued with a Christian ethos.

### **Cancelling Sin**

The drive to cancel this out, then, ultimately is the attempt to cancel out the founder of the Church, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This really, though, is nothing more than the old and ugly tendency toward sin, a tendency that affects all of us in our human weakness. The protagonists of cancel culture want to cancel it *all* out, altogether. But let us not think that the religiously observant are exempt from this inclination to sin; that inclination is universal in our human nature. For the religiously observant, the tendency is to just cancel out the parts they

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don't like, and keep the rest, whatever the inconvenient part of the teaching might be – all of that teaching about forgiveness, patience, going the extra mile and turning the other cheek, purity and integrity, keeping the Sabbath holy – whatever it might be.

All of us, then, in some way are with the crowds in this story: instead of beholding our King, we claim, “We have no king but Cesar.” It is our sins that, with the crowd, shout out, “Crucify him!” No, there is nothing new about this. We are back in the Garden of Eden at the time of the fall: it is the attempt to cancel out God, in order to do things our own way.

There is, though, one cancel culture our Lord did come to establish: canceling out sin. He has done that on the Cross, paying the debt we owed to God but which we could not pay ourselves. Since it was man who incurred the debt, man had to pay it back. So that is the one thing that he did need to receive from us, a human nature, so, as man, he could pay back what we could not without his divine nature. But he only “needed” this because he condescended to come to our rescue, not because he stood to get anything out of it himself.

### **Conclusion**

This is truly Good News. And not just because of what we receive, but because of the lesson it teaches us about how we are to live together well. That comes not from looking at what one gets out of it, but rather looking out for the good of the other before one's self. And only he makes that possible.

It is good that the Church gives us this one day of the year, this very somber day, even violent day, to remind us of who our King really is. It is good that we behold him dead on the Cross. And it is good, too, to see in the inscription above him his plan for our living in a world in which his truth, beauty and goodness can thrive, a civilization of truth and love that leads all into the true and lasting happiness with him that he came to win for us.