

## PASTOR'S COLUMN

### *A Memorable Good Friday Passion Service*

When I was a new priest, in my first Holy Week as a priest, the Pastor asked if I would bring forth the cross for veneration during the Good Friday Passion Service. I replied, "Sure." The other people at the Liturgy meeting smiled. The Pastor added, "You may be thinking this is a 3-foot cross as in other churches, but our cross is 8 feet tall and 5 feet wide. It is made of solid wood and weighs about 100 lbs. You won't carry it. You will drag it up the main aisle of the church. Still interested?" "Sure," I said sheepishly.

The Pastor didn't exaggerate the size or weight of the cross. On Good Friday, I literally dragged this huge and heavy cross up the main aisle of the Church. The cross made an eerie sound as it was being dragged, a sound that I imagine the real cross of Jesus made as he dragged it to Calvary. When I reached the front of the church, four ushers took the cross from me, lifted it into a large wooden stand (which had boards extending in four directions to keep it from falling over). The ushers hammered the cross into the stand with a number of spikes, which again sounded like it could have sounded on the day of Jesus' death. Vertical in the stand, the cross was an impressive sight to behold.

One by one, parishioners stepped forward to kiss the cross. They had to navigate the wooden floor boards supporting the cross stand in order to reach and venerate it. The process took a while since the church was full. Finally, the last parishioner came forward to venerate the cross; he was a man in a wheelchair. Determined though he was, he couldn't get his wheelchair close enough to the cross to venerate it because the wooden floor boards prevented him. Unexpectedly, he backed up his wheelchair, revved it with full force, and drove it on top of the wooden floor boards. His wheelchair dangled above the ground atop the floor boards. Then, leaning forward and placing his arms around the central beam of the cross, the man lifted himself out of his seat with great difficulty, hugged and kissed the cross, and then plopped back in his wheelchair. The ushers dislodged the wheelchair from the stand and helped the man back to his pew.

As I looked up, I didn't see a dry eye in church. Everyone "got" it: the man, despite his disability, was determined to honor and thank Jesus for his death on the cross. Twenty-five years later, this remains a lasting memory of my first Good Friday as a priest.

As we begin Holy Week 2019, may we each honor and thank Jesus for all the gifts of Holy Week: the gifts of the Eucharist and Priesthood, the gift of Jesus' death, and the gift of Jesus' resurrection and our salvation. The Services of Holy Week beckon us to participate in the great drama of our redemption with gratitude and reverence.

Have a very blessed Holy Week,  
Fr. Joe