

The crucifixion is a very familiar image, known probably to everybody on the planet. A contour of some sort of an arid ground, maybe rock. On the contour are two large beams connected together creating a shape of a cross, and a person hanging on this cross. Depending on the artist and time period, either very realistic with every vein, every drop of blood precisely marked; or very symbolic, suggesting only shapes and colors of the human body.

Jesus is alone on the cross. Every artist makes sure that the proportions of the painting and the position of the bodies never deny this one fact: Jesus is alone on the cross. Even if the scene of the crucifixion is enriched by the outline of two thieves crucified on each side of Jesus, or much more often, by the shapes of Mary, John and other saints standing at the foot of the cross. Of all the paradoxes in the history of God becoming man for our salvation, this one is probably the most striking. How can God be alone? After all, He is never-dying life. He is eternal movement both of the stars and of the souls. He is the beginning of everything that lives. He is in every heartbeat. He is the beginning and the end. "He is the Alpha and the Omega." He is the one who unites the universe, who gives glory and life to the angels and all the creatures of the heavens. He is the one always wrapped in the never-ending embrace of the Trinity – the mystery of constant gift and acceptance of the gift. The mystery of God. How can He be alone?

The celebration of Good Friday, the day of crucifixion of the Lord, is striking for this very reason. It depicts very faithfully the loneliness of Jesus Christ. The mother is standing next to him paralyzed by pain in the great mystery of compassion. The disciples are gone except for one who doesn't know what to do. All of the crowds who greeted him a couple days ago are nowhere to be seen. Now, the anger of the crowd emphasizes his loneliness. And then the pain. Pain has this strange ability of locking us in ourselves, of making itself the very center of everything, of pushing away everybody. And he was in constant, excruciating pain. This is how far God is ready to go to meet us. His mystery of incarnation reaches the climax of freedom here. He freely enters the darkest space of humanity. He dies alone in the middle of the big city, mocked by spectators. Not to shock us by the brutality of that scene, but to reveal the love of the Father.

This is not all. If we keep looking closely at Jesus crucified, we will see that even the utmost rejection, pain, and loneliness cannot disarm God's love. In the last seconds of his earthly life, he uses the words: "God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This last utterance of Jesus sounds like a final rejection and surrender. It is not. These are the words of prayer: Psalm 22. This is the psalm that begins prayer at the celebration of a Jewish funeral. God who is alone – Christ alone on the cross in the last breath of his life on earth - still offers himself to the Father in prayer. Christ already knows that his complete gift of self was completely received by the Father. The power and the totality of this gift breaks completely the logic of death. The logic that has been defining humanity until now. This is why the cross becomes a sign of victory and redemption. It opens the darkest and the most shameful parts of humanity with the brightest and most tender gift of the Father.

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

It doesn't cease to surprise me how this unexpected Lent of 2020 helps us to penetrate the mystery of Christ's loneliness. When you are in your home in isolation from your friends, your family, tired of small spaces and broken routines, you can discover strong connection to Christ in the mystery of Good Friday. The liturgy of Good Friday consists of two steps. The first is the stations of the cross, celebrated during the day, very often at 3pm. I have attached one of my favorite texts of the stations, written by Pope

Benedict the XVI in 2005. You can find many more great reflections on the websites of different dioceses and also the Vatican. The second step of Good Friday is the liturgy of the cross. We read the passion for the second time this week. And then we simply unveil and adore the cross. As usual, I am attaching for you the link to the Home Prayer Service proposed by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The liturgy ends in silence, and this silence remains in the Church until Saturday evening.

I will know you Lord one day. No cloud will be covering your light. No lies will be blurring your truth. No confusion will be dimming your wisdom.

I will meet you Lord one day. My insecurity and selfishness will not distance us from each other. My misguided zeal and my wounds will not lead me astray anymore.

I will love you Lord one day. With the same love but calmer and stronger. With the same hope but firmer. And you will be present, and you will be attentive, and you will be real. As you have always been.

Nothing can stop your mercy.