

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

Good Friday - Year B – April 2, 2021

Welcome to our celebration of Good Friday. Today is that one day when the Mass is not celebrated but our liturgy is categorized in three parts. Liturgy of the Word, reading of the Passion which is going to conclude with my reflection. Then we will go into prayers of Intercession. Veneration of the Cross. Distribution of Holy Communion.

Good Friday is special because it gives us an opportunity to reflect on what the cross means to us.

All of us love to identify with the cross; we see it as a harmless pious symbol. We sign ourselves with the sign of the cross. When I bless you, I do it using the Trinitarian formula. We use it as a decoration on our buildings, top of our building, hang it in our cars on our necks. For many years I wore it on my finger as a ring. If all we see in the cross is this harmless pious symbol with which we all want to identify, then we cannot understand truly the power of this day.

Crucifixion was the worst thing anyone in Jesus' time could possibly ever imagine. It was very a very awful experience. The pain it brought was called "excruciating pain" which is *"the worst pain you can possibly imagine."*

They say the Romans inherited this instrument of torture from the Persians, but the Romans actually brought it to full expression.

Usually, the person to be executed would have to carry the cross beam to the place of execution. So, we see in one of the stations, Jesus carries the cross, and the Roman soldiers enlisted a passerby (Simon of Cyrene) to help Him carry it.

The cross would be fixed to an upright position, then the person to be executed would either have to be tied by ropes to the cross or nailed. Sometimes it was a combination of both. The person would then be left hanging, rocking and struggling to breathe.

They say what killed a person was a combination of things:

- as you were rocking up and down, that would produce the excruciating pain,
- you were not able to breathe; your lungs would collapse.
- the bleeding caused by the wounds of the nails.

What's more, it was the humiliation of the cross. It is for our sensibility that Jesus is depicted as wearing a linen cloth around his waist area. Jesus was probably crucified naked. Imagine yourself standing naked in a public place. People would pass by and they would see you, mock you and throw things at you. All that's happening while you were in pain.

The mother of Jesus was at the foot of the cross watching all of this. This was a fulfilment of that prophecy "*a sword of sorrow would piece her heart.*" Her role is fundamental to our salvation.

Why did Jesus go through all this? Because He loved us unconditionally. So, what is our message today?

- While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- He took away our infirmities and carried our diseases and, by his stripes, we are healed.
- "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that who ever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.*"

The next time you make the Sign of the Cross/celebrate Good Friday/venerate the cross, think about God's unconditional love for you expressed on the cross.

Chris Tomlin captures God's unconditional love in the most profound way in his song, *Amazing Grace*: "*My chains are gone, I have been set free, my Savior has ransomed me...*"