“By His Wounds We Have Been Healed”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Good Friday

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“It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured … But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed.” Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the whole Christian world pauses on this day to recall the death of Jesus. It’s a day of sadness but also a day of thanksgiving and unfailing hope. Our Good Friday is altered this year, and in fact, this time of the coronavirus pandemic has been like a long, extended Good Friday; our whole world is suffering through a sort of Passion. But when we offer these hardships in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, we share in his redemptive sacrifice. We are on the way of the cross, and we carry the cross with Jesus.

The cross stands before us this day, with Jesus nailed upon it. A skeptical world looks at the cross and might ask “Why?” Why did he do this? What is this for? What’s the big deal? Even on that first Good Friday, we know there were crowds in the streets, and many were shouting for blood, calling for Jesus to be crucified. But there were others too, and I suspect many of them were just indifferent. There must have been those who looked at what was happening and didn’t really care. Some who saw Jesus stagger through the streets, and fall to the ground, and cringe at the scourging probably thought, “This is none of my business, and I don’t want to get involved.” They were content to be bystanders, to watch for awhile and then go back to their own affairs.

But the cross of Good Friday doesn’t allow us to be bystanders. It doesn’t allow us to be uninvolved. Pilate didn’t want to get involved either, and he washed his hands to show that this was not his doing. But he was involved, he couldn’t stay out of it. He had to make a choice, and he chose death rather than life. He chose to let evil prevail rather than truth and goodness. Even Peter tried to stay on the sidelines too, not quite indifferent, but not willing to risk anything either. So detached was he that he denied he even knew Jesus.

The indifferent and the skeptical wonder why this is such a big deal, and the answer is simple. We were utterly and completely lost, we as individuals and also as a human race were doomed to eternal death because of our sin. But God loved us too much to leave it at that. God looked at us in the misery of our sin, past, present, and future, and he had to do something to save us. He couldn’t hold back because his love is so great. He couldn’t look away and be indifferent to us because he had formed us on the palm of his hand. With the tenderness of a loving Father, he had made us to be his children, and he wanted to lavish every blessing on us that he has to offer.

So, God sent his Son in our flesh, in a human nature that could pay the price and be the cause of our redemption. Jesus willingly accepted the cross on his shoulders, and in doing so, he carried every one of our sins upon his soul. He endured the mockery and taunts of the crowds, and the indifference too, in the hope that we might see who he really is and what he is doing for
us. He fell to the ground again and again so that we might be lifted up. He allowed his hands and his feet to be nailed to the cross so that our hardened hearts might finally be pierced by repentance and by compassion. From the cross he asked his Father to forgive his persecutors, and us too, because “they do not know what they are doing.” He suffers the feeling of forsakenness, of condemnation to take away our condemnation. And finally he was voided, emptied of life on that cross, so that we could receive life, the life we were meant to have from all eternity.

If someone asks why, or what the big deal is about the cross, that’s the answer. God could not abandon us to die in sin, he wanted, needed to save us. His love moved him to go to the most extreme lengths to redeem us, because we are his children.

Pope Francis spoke two weeks ago in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak about the darkness that surrounds us, and he said this is a time of choosing. I believe the darkness of Good Friday is also a time of choosing. This day when our Lord suffered for us and died for our sins is a time to choose between what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. On the cross, the love of Jesus is poured out in death for our sakes. By his cross we have been healed, we have been saved. Are we willing to choose him as he has chosen us? Are we ready to lay aside indifference and aloofness?

What Jesus did on the cross was radical and drastic, it was shocking to those who loved him, and it should still be shocking to us. Once again, the cross doesn’t allow us to be bystanders. It demands a choice for or against the Christ who died for us. But the choice should be easy, because we know the final outcome, we know that death will not prevail. As we meditate on the death of Jesus, our hearts well up with gratitude for what he did for us. We are comforted to remember that no power on earth, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God.

Now, on this Good Friday, in the shadow of the Cross, we wait for the dawn of Easter, when he will be revealed to us once again in all his risen glory, and we remember “by his wounds we have been healed.”