

Good Friday, 2008
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On this day, we contemplate our Lord's suffering and his death. More than two thousand years have passed, and yet for Christians, the event is like yesterday. Good Friday stands as the day upon which God showed his greatest love. For us and for our salvation, God sent his only Son to the Cross. We talk about celebrating feast days and fast days, but "celebration" seems an inappropriate choice for the Good Friday liturgy. When we hear the story of our Lord's Passion, we cannot help but be emotional. But when we think about it, we must ask, why did these events take place? Why was Jesus rejected? Why was he put on trial? Above all, why did he have to die?

God is a God of love. God is a God of mercy. God is a God of forgiveness and compassion. He is slow to anger, and abides in steadfast love. Why, then, did his Son have to suffer the agony of the Cross? It is a question that deserves our attention.

To understand, we must turn, once, again, to the Old Testament book of Genesis. In Genesis, we read the ancient Jewish myth of creation. Genesis tells us of humanity's fall from grace. The fall is a result of disobedience. The essence of that fall is that humanity chose to place itself on par with God. The story tells us about Adam and Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This means that humanity, for Adam and Eve represent humanity, chose to replace God with themselves; humanity opted out on God.

God created us from his love, and his intent was that we would exist in love, a relationship of love offered and love returned. But for love to truly exist there must be freedom, the freedom to love or not to love. The Church calls the freedom to choose, to love or not love, "free will." God created us with the ability to love him or not to love him. The Genesis story tells us that God does not force love either way.

Human history is the story of this love, on again and off, from humanity's perspective. From God's perspective, his love for us never ceases. The Holy Scriptures tell us of God's covenant of love made with Abraham, in which Abraham's descendents would be God's children. The Scriptures tell us of God's deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt when, through Moses, God led the children of Israel out of slavery. These are all stories of love, stories of God reaching out to redeem and restore his children. But interwoven in these stories are also stories of disobedience, of humanity using free will to say "No" to God. And consistently, we find that although God prods, God leads, God persuades, never does God compel. God gave us laws, holy laws, to guide our lives, and consistently we disobeyed them. God sent holy men, prophets, to warn us, and consistently we disobeyed them. Again and again, God called us to holiness and asked us to walk the walk of the righteous, and we ignored him. Finally, God must have said, "I don't know what else to do, so I will come to them as one of them, and take on the burden of their disobedience, so that they will be set free from their sin."

God's Word took on flesh. God became human in the person of Jesus Christ, and Jesus did for us what we never did for ourselves. Jesus chose to love God the way that God intended humanity to love him. Jesus chose to be righteous in the way that God intended humanity to be righteous. Jesus never broke the relationship with God, and through his perfection, through his obedience, he took our brokenness and offered it to God with his life. He did for us what we could not or, more properly, would not do for ourselves.

If there was another way, if we might have found righteousness by some other manner, we have not discovered it and God has not revealed it to us. What we have is God's gift of his Son, and the gift was given on Good Friday. We talk about it in terms of Passover, of deliverance from bondage, and this is the best way of talking about it, because Jesus became our sacrificial lamb. We were slaves to sin, but in Jesus we are offered the gift of freedom.

Good Friday's question is simply this. What do we do with this gift? We can reject it, because we still have free will. We can accept it because we recognize it as unconditional and perfect love. The choice is ours. *Amen.*

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