

HOMILIES FROM THE HERMITAGE

On view of the current isolation and detachment from normal ministry, it seemed good to provide some other ways in which to keep in contact. There will be some ‘thoughts’ (not each day), some shared ideas and maybe some pleasantries.

CORONA 14 : THE TRIDUUM

GOOD FRIDAY

The day of greatest shame and sorrow and also the day of greatest grace and victory.

There are three parts in the liturgy: a) the frightful failure of Jesus’ ministry and His terrible death: b) the penitence and acknowledgement of our sins which brought Jesus to such a terrible end c) the Triumph of Jesus of the Cross where He is victor over sin and death.

The only formal Liturgy is at 3.00pm the traditional time of Jesus’ death. The entry consists of a formal of silent prostration in front of the altar followed by a short prayer. The liturgy then consists of four parts: Scripture reading: formal Bidding Prayers: veneration of the Cross: Holy Communion. In many ways each is separate from the other.

1. The liturgy gives us the final of the servant songs: Isaiah 52/53 often described as ‘the Passion according to Isaiah’. But note the triumph at the end. Through suffering Servant wins the victory. The second reading is from Hebrews: ‘The Son obeying through suffering.... became for all who obey Him the source of everlasting salvation.’ The Passion is that of St. John Chapters 18 and 19.
 2. The Bidding Prayers are very formal: a) introduction: b) declaration of intention: c) pause for prayer: d) the prayer..
 3. The unveiling of the Cross and its solemn procession. Sung by Reproaches and admission of our sins.
 4. A simple Holy Communion followed by two prayers. Exit in silence.
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It is easy for us to home in on each our own sins—and it is true that even if each one of us was the only person in the world, Jesus would still have done exactly the same as He did for all of us. There is place for sorrow, shame and empathy with Our Lord on the Cross. It is sometimes said ‘how could a loving Father’ demands such a price of His beloved Son’? But it is not our loving Father who demands that price: it is we--because of our sins.

But we focus more on the nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. Jesus, Son of God, God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity has come down to earth and He, totally wholly and without sin, has taken on us our sinful human flesh, and in that flesh offers Himself to God His Father and thereby enable us all to be rid of sin and death. His total obedience to His Father is directly in contrast to the disobedience of Adam by which we separated ourselves from God. This total obedience and abandonment of self overcomes the sin of Adam and thereby restores us to union with God. For the Cross is the instrument of salvation, and in that Cross Jesus achieves what no-one else could do and to take us back to our Father. Ancient images of Jesus on the Cross show Jesus as King, Saviour and in triumph. We focus on this on Holy Cross Day, but it is there on Good Friday. It is good Friday and in St. John the final words of Jesus are ‘It is achieved’. (Isaiah 53 and Psalm 21/22 both end in glory)

Here is a mystery: in St Matthew and St Mark there is total abandonment where Jesus dies with a shriek and agony in total failure. But in St. Luke Jesus bows to His Father ‘In your hands I commit my spirit’. In St. John Jesus dies with a claim of success. How do we reconcile these accounts? Or should we? Let us instead move to the split moment. As when heaven and earth held their breath for Mary’s reply to Gabriel, so let us imagine a second split moment, at 3.00 on Good Friday the powers of death crowed at their success—only to realize in horror that they had been vanquished. Imagine the frustrated howls echoing round the empty vaults of Hell when the powers of darkness suddenly realized that the cleverly engineered destruction has suddenly turned on them in defeat. They have failed: and Jesus has won the victory.

And don’t try to work it out: it is all true—a terrible death and failure which was the triumph by which we can live.

