

## Good Friday “Behold Your Mother”

Fr. Frank Schuster

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

My friends, as Holy Week began this year, Monday felt like Friday. As we watched Notre Dame Cathedral burn to the ground, how many of us felt like those gathered at the foot of the cross in our passion reading today, powerless, as the tragedy horrifically unfolded before our eyes? Over nine hundred years of history, of a building that took two centuries to build, reduced to ash in little over an hour. Notice that it didn't take long for cynics to jeer about how the Cathedral fire was a fitting metaphor for a post Christian Europe. And then the Parisians showed us something quite remarkable. As they stood helpless before the flames of Notre Dame, someone began to sing a hymn to Mary, another voice joined that person with a quivering voice, and soon it felt like the whole world joined them in prayer.

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

As the flames of Notre Dame slowly were extinguished and a photographer was finally allowed in to give the world a glimpse of the devastation, it was amazing how the gold cross that adorned the high altar shined through the rubble and the smoke. And it felt like a sign from God. That cross is part of a sculpture recalling Jesus' mother Mary grieving over the body of her dead son at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, today. The artist of that high altar, Nicolas Coustou, most certainly would have had no idea when he completed that sculpture in 1725 that it would survive such a devastating fire almost three centuries later. And, he would have had no idea of how the gold cross shining through that devastation and smoke would provide such a message of hope in the face of such tragedy.

That is the power of the cross. On Good Friday, we join Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross. And like them, we feel powerless. There was nothing we could do to prevent this. As we reflected last night, everything that the Chosen People went through from the first Passover of the Exodus thousands of years ago and all the trials, tribulations and tragedies we have experienced in the centuries that followed, have led us to this very night. Just as Moses was told to sacrifice a lamb for the salvation of his people; on the cross tonight Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Instead of us sacrificing ourselves in atonement for our sins, God has sacrificed himself out of love for us. We are challenged again to understand the Eucharist in this way. We are challenged to understand the cross and resurrection in this way. And we are challenged to understand our discipleship in this way.

And so we ask ourselves, what is the cross we are carrying in our life right now? It is important that we take a moment and think about it. What is the cross that we are carrying in our life right now? There are so many crosses to pick from. Perhaps you are working a job you do not enjoy to provide for your family. Perhaps you struggle with physical pain or mental infirmity or addiction. What is your cross? Perhaps you are in a troubled marriage? Perhaps you are a single parent? Maybe you are alone, trying to find meaning in life. Maybe you feel like your life is in ruins, filled with devastation and smoke. What is your cross? Think about it. After our intercessions this evening, you will have the opportunity to come forward and embrace the wood of the cross. You see, tonight we all join Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross. We can all feel the body of our Lord in our arms; the one who loves us, the one who died for us. And yet, through the smoke and devastation, the cross shines brilliantly, one might say defiantly, as a beacon of hope because we know death does not have the final say. The cross we embrace on Good Friday leads us to an empty tomb.