

Good Friday 2020 “Saved in Hope Revisited Part II”

Fr. Frank Schuster

This is the darkest day in the Church’s calendar commemorating perhaps the darkest day in human history. And yet, somehow we call today Good Friday. There is a dissonance in calling today good. It doesn’t feel right to call this day good. Why would we call this day of all days good? The answer is what the cross points us to. The answer is hope. Last night, as we began the Holy Triduum, I revisited Pope Benedict’s thoughts from his encyclical *Spe Salvi* that the message Christianity offers the world, especially tonight, is hope. And hope is medicine we all desperately need, especially this year above all years. Imagine living in this world without God. Imagine that. Without God we can only perceive life as coming from nothingness and returning to nothingness. With God, with Jesus, we know we have a future. We may not know all the details of where our lives are going but we know our lives do not end in emptiness.

My friends, central to this liturgy tonight is the veneration of the wood of the cross. In the past, this veneration involved touching or even kissing the cross. Even that is taking away from us this year. However, you might very well have a cross hanging right now on one of the walls in your home. Perhaps after this homily you might reach out and touch that cross. Maybe your family members can do the same. Or perhaps you can take that cross off the wall and take turns holding it in your hands. Before we do this, I wish to reflect on this activity.

You see, the crucifix at face value is an awful thing. It depicts a device of extreme torture that is meant to inflict humiliation and suffering. And so, the cross on the one hand reminds us that suffering is part of the human experience. Some of us tonight have physical sufferings that come from illness. Some of us tonight have emotional suffering that comes from being hurt. Some of us tonight are suffering because of grief. All of us tonight are weighed down by our sins. And the Father responds to us by giving us his only Son nailed to the cross.

Pope Benedict reflects that “...Suffering is part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today”. And Pope Benedict goes on to praise the great progress that the sciences have made to alleviate suffering, however, he continues with a profound insight that I believe is very prophetic of the time we live in today. He writes, “Indeed, we must do everything we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and none of us are capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence this power ‘to take away the sin of the world’ is present in the world. Through faith in the

existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history.” Hope, he says. Hope. And so, on the one hand the cross reminds us of the suffering we experience in the world. On the other hand, the cross reveals to us that God knows our suffering. God shares our pain. God entered fully into our existence on the wood of the cross. Therefore, the cross is also a symbol of hope, thanks to Jesus and only Jesus. “*Spe salvi facti sumus*”, in hope we are saved.

My friends, on this holy night Psalm 139 is fulfilled. O where can I hide from your love O Lord. If I run to the mountains, you are there. If I run to the ocean, you are there. If I fall into the deepest darkest pit, *sheol*, to hell itself, you are there O Lord. What this means is: When we find ourselves crucified in life, our heavenly Father's only Son is there right beside us. How is this possible without the bond of the Holy Spirit? The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus reveal to us a conspiracy of love of a Triune God that wills to save you and me and us all.

And so, what are the wounds we are carrying in our life right now? What are the worries, anxieties, and sufferings we carry within us each and every day? Think about that right now. We are all concerned about the virus sweeping the globe, so we all bring that to the cross and the intentions of everyone who is affected by it, those who are sick and caregivers alike. However, if we are honest with ourselves, most of us have deeper concerns than Covid 19 and these thoughts can wound us every day. The invitation is to bring all of it to the cross tonight. When I venerate the cross this evening tonight in our church, I invite you to touch that crucifix in your home. And when you do so, I invite you to feel Jesus touching you in return. We know that everything in this life, the joys, the sorrows and everything in between; are opportunities that prepare us for the eternal life God has in store for us. We know this because our spiritual journeys do not conclude at the cross. Our journey continues as we keep vigil for the resurrection. Our Easter hope therefore makes this Friday of all Fridays very good indeed and is very good medicine for the soul. My friends, this year above all year, in hope we are saved.