

## 'Good Friday' Sermon – 29 March 2024

### Fr Chester Lord – St Peter's, Brighton Beach

As Junior School Chaplain at Brighton Grammar School, I am often creating new and educational assignments to do during Religious Education lessons and classes. One particular project that the boys have to complete is to choose, research and present a leader from the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) that they believe have (A). contributed to others in some significant and beneficial manner, and (B). has sacrificed something of themselves in the process. The leaders that they have selected from the Bible have served to be both enlightening and inspiring.

Their standout and defining traits might be bravery, valour, patriotism, saintliness or sheer commitment to their cause. However, one characteristic is common for all of them and that is that they have each made a **sacrifice** of some kind, and through that a significant contribution towards, and better life for many people, and perhaps even humanity. Their sacrifice might consist of their time, their considerable efforts or their own wants or needs being put aside. They often shy away from personal fame or grand acknowledgment but are driven instead by an intrinsic desire for the greater good or a higher noble cause. Examples of characters selected have ranged from Moses, Joseph, Daniel, Mary, Peter and John the Baptist.

These examples draw me back to our Gospel reading that we have just heard this afternoon. Here we encounter another sacrifice: an ultimate sacrifice, of one giving up one's own life for another, or in this case, all humankind.

Good Friday, today, is the day that we recall and remember Jesus' own sacrifice by his crucifixion. But there is more to it than mere remembering. It's understandable that we want to embrace the resurrection on Easter Sunday, but Jesus calls us to the cross too. There's a saying that declares, *"It's Friday, but Sunday is coming!"* More to the point is that Friday is the road to Sunday. There is no Easter Sunday without Good Friday. There is no resurrection without the sacrifice on the cross. The suffering of Jesus upon the cross is necessary in and of itself, and that is what we observe and ponder today.

The very idea of Good Friday causes many some degree of concern. That in His power and wisdom it all still led to the cross. Those who had seen His works wondered why He seemed so vulnerable at His time of greatest need. Some even refer to Good Friday as *'Long Friday'*, *'Black Friday'* or even *'Sad Friday'* according to their respective traditions.

But in some way, they would have missed the true essence of sacrifice. As Jesus Himself said, *"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it produces many"*. Not just His words, but His very life, death and resurrection is a parable.

Jesus didn't have to experience the depth of suffering He did...but He chose to. He willingly walked through the uglier aspects of humanity, perhaps the worst type being betrayal, the indignity of being falsely accused and then the excruciating pain and torments of the crucifixion. He elected to experience these things on purpose.

In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah declares: The Lord says, *"My servant will succeed in his task; he will be highly honoured. Many*

*people were shocked when they saw him; he was so disfigured that he hardly looked human. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet he did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open His mouth.”*

- He chose to so that when you think that your heart might break from grief, you'd know He understands.
- And if sadness threatens to overwhelm to the point of tears and exhaustion, you'd know He understands.
- And if you feel betrayal of the deepest, most intimate nature, you'd know He understands.
- And if your body is betraying you with sickness, disease or injury, you'd know He understands.

We have a saviour who willingly experienced horrific injury and grief so that we could never say “*Jesus wouldn't understand.*” So, this Good Friday, I am choosing to remember and thereby honour Jesus' sacrifice. I'm electing not to skip over the agony Jesus suffered.

For generations it is recorded in the Old Testament how the Israelites laboured to follow laws that were meant to atone for their sin and restore them to a right standing in the presence of God. But the blood of Israel's sacrifices (often lambs) was not like the blood shed by those others attempting to appease and approach the gods they feared and followed. The prophets sent throughout Israel's history were often insisting that God wanted more than the empty performance of sacrifice. He desired the offering to exemplify the heart of a worshipper, one yearning to

be in the presence of Him who created us, drawing nearer through the blood of a spotless lamb.

When Scriptures speak of Christ as the Lamb of God, it is easy to see the symbolism today on Good Friday. Christ as the lamb, the spotless lamb who died in my place. But the description moves beyond symbolism alone. He is the Lamb whose blood sacrifice atones, the lamb who forever moves me into the presence of God.

We read in Hebrews that ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds’, he also adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

There is a hymn that speaks of this sacrifice declaring:

*Behold the Lamb of God!  
Into the sacred flood  
Of thy most precious blood  
My soul I cast:  
Wash me and make me clean within,  
And keep me pure from every sin,  
Till this life be past.*

So, this is a journey or pilgrimage of hope: **death on Friday**. Jesus satisfies God’s law and sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world. This is a stunning convergence of God’s holy justice and divine love; His own son becoming the final perfect sacrifice for sin.

Then there is **faith on Saturday**. Despite Jesus Christ defeating sin and death on the cross we can still have moments of living with confidence and confusion, faith and doubt, clarity and questions, spiritual power and human weakness and frailty. Tomorrow, Saturday, reminds us of the importance of faith and the hope of things to come.

And finally, **new life on Sunday**. Jesus rose from the tomb on Sunday in victory over sin and death. He is alive now and forever, and his ultimate resurrection is the basis for our confident hope that one day everything will be made perfectly new.

But none of this would have been achieved without Good Friday occurring first. As one of my heroes of the faith, Desmond Tutu, is quoted saying *“For us who are Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof positive that love is stronger than hate, that life is stronger than death, that light is stronger than darkness, that laughter, joy, compassion, gentleness and truth are all so much stronger than their ghastly counterparts through what Christ suffered and achieved on the cross.”*

That is perhaps our challenge for this Good Friday. We must make time to reflect upon and remember the supreme sacrifice of the cross as more than just a tragedy, or of a picture of anguish and hopelessness. Of more than merely a Good Friday service, but rather something that we take, remember and use in our lives each day, sharing its renewal with others by our conduct and through God’s love and grace. A day that reveals to us a completely compassionate God who grieves with us when we despair and is a companion to us in our darkest days.

This utter solidarity with the human condition is the goodness we celebrate this morning and the hope with which we look for the light of the resurrection in our lives. Today Christ died to make us right with God, to offer us life in abundance...

...surely there is no greater sacrifice!

*Thanks be to God.*

*Amen.*