

## GOOD FRIDAY

### IN CROSS IS OUR VICTORY

*“They then took charge of Jesus and carrying His own Cross He went out of the city to the place of the skull, or, as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him with two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle” (Jn. 19: 18, 19)*

**The Cross:** Today, we celebrate Good Friday, when we commemorate the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion on the Cross. The Cross occupies the centre of our liturgical celebration and reflection as we contemplate the greatest love, “summa caritate,” ever shown. Generally, the cross is a symbol of pain and suffering, a reflection of the human burdens and sorrows, our helplessness in the face of mortal weakness. Today, the avoidable war in Ukraine/Russia; the persecutions in Yemen, China, Nigeria, etc; the sick and the dying in home and care facilities; the millions displaced from their homes and comforts to seek asylum as migrants in foreign countries are the existential realities of our global cross. The cross also is a portrays shame and dishonour. But the Cross of Christ, which stands at the centre of Christianity, stands for everything different from this general notion. By His Death via Crucifixion, the Cross takes up a new and redemptive meaning. The Cross had since become an icon of love, forgiveness, salvation, and hope with rich biblical and spiritual significance.

**The Wood of the Cross:** The wood of the Cross takes our minds back millions of years, when by the fruit of the tree man severed his relationship with God, and merited condemnation. The wood from the tree has now become the symbol of our salvation. St. Theodore of Studite sees some parallels with the Cross in many Old Testament events: in the pile of the wood whereupon Abraham laid Isaac to be sacrificed, he sees Christ, the New Isaac now laid on the wood of the Cross and sacrificed. Note that Isaac was a foreshadow of Jesus: for just as he allowed himself to be bound on the wood by the old father, Abraham, so will Jesus offer Himself, His Hands and Feet to be nailed to the wood of the Cross. In the wood that Noah collected to build an ark to save himself and his household from the destroying flood, St. Theodore sees the wood of the Cross saving us, not from flood but from eternal damnation. For him, the wooden staff of Moses, which swallowed the snakes of the magicians of Egypt, used to strike the Nile and its water turned into blood, to divide the Red Sea, used in striking the rock and water gushed out for the thirsty Jews, prefigured the wood of the Cross by which

we have been saved. He also sees an allusion to the Cross in the priestly rod of Aaron which budded and flowered on the same day to confirm his priestly status. On the wood of Cross, Christ offered the ultimate priestly sacrifice of Himself for us all. What do we see in the wood of the Cross? What does it mean to us?

***The Shape of the Cross:*** The Early Church Fathers saw in the shape and the four cardinal points of the Cross the sign of love so profound and sublime. In the vertical points they saw the height and depth of God's love for us; in the horizontal points, they saw the width and breadth of that same love. This understanding is invoked by St. Paul, when he prayed for the Christians in Ephesus that the Holy Spirit may fill them with the power to understand the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ for us. (Eph. 3: 18). The Cross challenges us today to demonstrate a love so deep and open-ended for our brothers and sisters. When we look at our world, filled with so much hatred, the cry for love could not be any louder.

***The One of the Cross:*** What makes our Cross different is because of the One who hangs on it. Christ on the Cross sanctifies the wood of the Cross. With Christ on the Cross, the wood of shame becomes the throne of honour. The wounds of the nails become the marks of love; the pierced side becomes the open invitation to us to love without counting costs. The Cross is a sign of our victory, our power over sin and death, a symbol of our hope, which bears the messages – "No pain, no gain;" and "No crown without a cross." It is the sign of our salvation. Pope Benedict XVI writes on the power of the Christ's Death on the Cross very hopefully thus:

The gates of death are closed, no one can return from there. There is no key for those iron doors. But Christ has the key. His Cross opens wide the gates of death, the stern doors. They are barred no longer. His Cross, His radical love is the key that opens them. The love of the One who, though God, became man in order to die – this love has the power to open these doors. This love is stronger than death.

***My dear friends,*** let us allow the message of Christ on the Cross to challenge us so that we can love sacrificially as he loves us. Let us not be ashamed of the Cross but let it be a constant reminder of the love that the Father has shown us by sending His Son to die for us that we might have life in full (Jn. 10: 10). Let the Cross of Christ remind us that in all our sufferings Christ suffers with us and that

there is hope in every suffering. Let us not forget that just as Christ's journey did not end at the Cross and His Crucifixion on Calvary, so our life's journey will not end in the pains and sorrows we may be going through now. Let us say proudly then: "We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You; because by You Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world."