

RENEW LENT - GOOD FRIDAY

MARCH 29, 2024

Embracing the Cross: Clinging to Christ

By Alexis Abello

Our first reading tells us that, "the seedling to come will emerge from the parched dirt." We are all parched; drained, exhausted, and in longing, desperate to be rescued. The first reading continues that the one will be "one of those from whom people hide their faces." This, our error from the garden; the hiding, the covering of not only our faces and bodies but the covering up of sins, wrong doings and emptiness. But that verse continues "and we held him in no esteem." It speaks to our habit of relying on ourselves, our own rescue attempts, which prevents God's action, in and through us.

The gospel story opens in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to the Gospel, Judas "knew the place because Jesus had often met there with his disciples." A haven of protection, rest, and peace, where they came to know Jesus in ways we can only imagine, such as hearing his laugh, or seeing his eyes twinkle as he shared the meaning of the parables. A location whose name in Hebrew, means "oil press." The site where today there was no laughter to be heard, as grief and sorrow crushed our Saviour. Perhaps, it was in this garden that Jesus realized just how much each of us, easily choose ourselves and our comforts before His, just like Judas.

According to St. Bridget of Sweden, Jesus revealed to her that He had 5,480 wounds on His body following His crucifixion. While we may not always have chosen Him, 5, 480 times He made the decision to choose you; a decision that was not based on what we ate or did not eat during the Lenten season; or gave to this charity or did not, rather, in His mercy, He accepted it all. He rejected condemnation for the sake of mercy.

Furthermore, as Jesus hung on the cross, naked, vulnerable, and exposed, "standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas and Mary of Magdala." These women were standing at the cross. They had the courage to not cower in fear or run for safety. They did not let their desire for comfort or fear of suffering stand in the way. They were resolved, despite the anguish in their own hearts, to be fully present, fully themselves with the one they loved, Jesus.

Then, 3:00 PM. "It is finished," the heavens are "split apart," nothing can sever.

Lastly, after a pause, the day of preparation arrives; to prepare us for what is to come, an opportunity to bring our Lord off the cross, and into our lives. But not before a "lance is thrust into his side," another wound, that provides us with access to Him, and to his Sacred Heart.



In this life, there will always be something—perhaps something painful or crushing—that stands in the way of our relationship with Jesus. Many churches will conclude today's service with the veneration of the cross, and a stripping of the altar. As we witness the culmination of the story—the story that began and concluded in a garden—we invited to embrace His sacrifice with not only an open tomb but open hearts—no longer hiding, but laid bare.

Let us choose to embrace our crosses, but, cling to the One who endured it.

For Your Reflection:

- Reflect on a time when you faced a choice between personal comfort and sacrificial love. What did you choose, and what were the consequences?
- Consider the significance of Jesus' wounds as a testament to unconditional love. How does this perspective shape your understanding of mercy and forgiveness?
- In what ways can you emulate the courage and resolve of the women who stood by Jesus' cross, despite their own anguish? How might this influence your approach to supporting others in difficult times?

*Grant us the courage to stand firm in faith,
Like the women who stood by the cross.
Help us to find strength in Your presence
And to trust in Your unwavering love.
Amen.*
