

GOOD FRIDAY HOMILY – (Homily 04)  
“The Cross as a Blessing”  
(Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; Jn 18:1-19:42)

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At Christmas, we are moved and touched by the crib scene. On Good Friday, we must let ourselves be moved and touched by the cross scene. The wood of the crib has become the wood of the cross.

Fr. Mathieu OMI who is now in Patuanak has a saying that he uses often: “The Cross is a Blessing.”

In the Divine Office, or the Liturgy of the Hours, there is an antiphon that goes like this: “Take hold of the wood of the cross and plunge into the river of life.” That is the invitation extended to us this Good Friday celebration.

What makes the cross a blessing, and makes these statements possible, is the fact that the cross reveals, above all else, God’s unconditional, unfathomable love for us, for all of humanity, for all of creation, and challenges us to love God, others and ourselves in a like manner.

The vertical arm represents the love of God for us. Jesus, the Son of God, the obedient, suffering servant, hanging on the cross, demonstrates selfless love in action.

On the cross, Jesus takes in all the negative dark energy of the world and instead of responding in kind, simply transforms it into pure love as forgiveness, which then becomes for us the source of eternal salvation.

Our invitation is to believe, to put our faith in this Jesus, to approach the throne of grace with boldness, and receive this same forgiveness. It is this love that transformed St. Eugene de Mazenod, the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate as he gazed upon the feet of Jesus on the cross one Good Friday over one hundred and fifty years ago. It is that experience of the love, compassion and forgiveness of Jesus that empowered him to go out and found a world wide congregation of missionaries dedicated to the Mother of this God, Jesus, hanging on the cross.

The horizontal arm of the cross, in turn, represents our love for others. This arm invites us to love one another as Jesus has loved us, to especially move towards forgiving all those who have hurt us in any way.

This arm represents the core of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus: love one another; love one another as I have loved you; do to others what you would have them do to you; love your neighbour as you love yourself; love your enemies. That is the Gospel in a nutshell.

There are vertical two arms reaching out. One can represent the dimension of loving relationships, while the other can represent the dimension of caring and service. Both are ways that we can love one another. We can express that love through loving relationships of trust and intimacy, as well as dedicated service and works of mercy and caring.

The third part of the cross is the place where the two arms meet and form a cross. That juncture can represent the call to love ourselves. Sometimes that is where we fail the most. To love one's self is also a part of the Great Commandment that Jesus gave to us. To forgive ourselves of the mistakes that we have made in life, to accept ourselves as we are, to be able to accept compliments, to be able to say "Thank you" when others affirm us, is all part of loving ourselves.

Tom discovered the cross as a blessing when his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The terrible reality of that disease came home to him when he realized that she no longer recognized him or knew who he was. One day she introduced him to someone else in the nursing home as her brother. Eventually she lost all ability except to eat and sleep. He would then visit her at meal times and feed her, as that was the only way that she would interact with him.

As time went by, he realized that he was becoming more patient; more understanding and more compassionate with others, as the result of feeding his mother, who was always, true to her nature, trying to give her food away to others even as he was trying to feed her. That experience humbled him and challenged him to grow in love. The end result was that he could now see the mystery of the cross as a blessing, lived out in his own life.

That is our challenge today, not just to venerate the cross, but to let its lessons penetrate our very being so that we too will see the cross as a blessing.

So, today, this Good Friday let us grasp the wood of the cross, see it as a blessing and plunge into the river of life.