



**Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem  
Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy**

Good Friday Passion of the Lord  
April 2, 2021

*Homily of The Most Reverend William E. Lori, KC\*HS  
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**I. What Kind of a Sign Is the Cross?**

**A.** Years ago, a new church was being built in a diocese where I formerly served. As was required, the pastor and his team presented detailed architectural plans for the review of the diocesan building commission.

Looking over the interior furnishings of the proposed church, I happened to notice that there was to be no crucifix in the sanctuary, only an image of the Risen Lord, perched above the altar.

When I pointed out the omission to the pastor, he smiled and said,  
“We want our parishioners to be happy. The crucifix is a gruesome image.  
In our parish, we are a ‘resurrection people . . . .’”

Suffice it to say, that a crucifix, and a nice one at that, was hung in that new church.

**B.** From time to time, I recall that meeting, not because my intervention made the pastor and his team unhappy, but rather because it prompted me to examine my own sentiments about the true significance of the Cross of Christ – the Cross of Christ which today we will unveil and adore.

Is it a sign of death or life? Does it speak of sin or forgiveness?

Does it speak of despair or hope?

Is it indeed gruesome or is it a source of joy and consolation?

These questions are important because, what we think of the Cross of Christ may well define our acceptance or rejection of Christianity itself.

## **II. *Crux fidelis, inter omnes . . .***

**A.** If I may say so, I believe that the Cross is so precious and life-giving and beautiful because it speaks both of death and life, sin and forgiveness, despair and hope; that it sanitizes none of life's gruesomeness yet brings us joy and consolation.

Towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, a Latin poet named Venantius Fortunatus penned the original *Pange Lingua*, a hymn of praise to the Crucified Redeemer. This poet with mystic's soul can still teach us how to hold in tension "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" (GS, 1) that are woven into the very fabric of Christianity.

**B.** In words that reflect the bitterness of the Cross, the poet writes:

"Lo with gall His thirst he quenches!  
see his thorns upon his brow!  
nails His tender flesh are rending!  
see His side is opened now!  
whence, to cleans the whole creation,  
streams of blood and water flow."

**C.** The verse ends by extolling the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ, the fountain of the Church's sacramental life by which we and all creation is cleansed. Building on this theme of cleansing and renewal, the next verse erupts in exaltation:

"O faithful Cross!  
above all other,  
one and only noble Tree!  
None in foliage, none in blossom,  
none in fruit thy peers may be;  
sweetest wood and sweetest iron!  
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee!

**D.** The Scriptures, the Liturgy, and sacred writers from every age reflect the truth that the Redemption which Jesus won for us by his death on the Cross encompasses the totality of our humanity – both our experience and our aspirations – our idleness and our industry – our degradation and our nobility – our failure and success . . . not, however, in a bi-polar way, zigging and zagging between extremes, but rather embracing us with an immense and tenderhearted love that reveals us to ourselves, causes us to come to terms with ourselves, and that sets our sights on a new horizon of hope beyond our power to imagine.

## **III. *The Liturgy of Good Friday***

**A.** Let us then enter into this Good Friday liturgy so that we too might experience the tender embrace of our Crucified Savior. With trembling and fear, let us have the courage to see in the

Lord's sufferings a revelation of the enormity of human sinfulness and the part we have played in it.

As we kneel with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, where, on our behalf, 'he offers prayers and supplications with cries and tears to the One who is able to save him from death' (Heb 5:7).

Let us resolve, not to abandon or forsake Christ as did Peter, but rather to accompany Christ all the way to Calvary, catching sight along the way of those who are being crucified in our own day, by poverty, hunger, unemployment, racism, persecution and so much else. As Jesus is hoisted upon the Cross, let us see clearly our need for redemption!

**B.** Then, conscious of our need of redemption, let us praise our Redeemer! How presciently the prophet Isaiah foresaw the mission of Christ crucified! Portraying the lowliness and sufferings of our Savior, Isaiah goes on to say, "It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured . . ." Let us join the prophet Isaiah in proclaiming that Jesus, our Savior and Lord, "was pierced for our offences, crushed for our sins; [and] upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole.

By his stripes we were healed" (Is 53:5).

And again, let us repeat lovingly St. Paul's confession of faith: "He loves me" . . . [and may I add, the whole of me!] . . .and he gave his life for me!"

**C.** Is, then, the Cross, a sign of life or of death? Does it speak of sin or forgiveness? Despair or hope? Is it gruesome or consoling? . . . It is all of these, for any notion of redemption that does not encompass the whole of our humanity does not do justice to the goodness of our Redeemer or to the beauty of our faith. Only the Cross, the Cross of Christ, fully embraces every dimension of our lives.

But as Jesus breathes forth his spirit, and blood and water gush forth from his side, life prevails over death; mercy over sin; hope over despair; consolation over misery – thus we call the Friday on which Christ died "Good Friday" and thus do we entrust the whole of our lives to the loving embrace of Jesus, the author of our life and the Lover of our Souls.

May God bless and keep us in his love!