

Good Friday 2020 SSP online

One thing I'm learning from physical distancing and online communication – it is a challenge and an opportunity to present Christ to his people, one by one, in their mandated isolation.

Mandated isolation is an occasion when we can consider afresh, each of us, our relationship to Jesus:

- While the electronic internet is the **physical conveyer**,
- **Prayer** is the **spiritual conveyer of that relationship**.

Let me tell you two stories about that relationship in my own case, one from my childhood, the other from my college years.

- The stories are forever connected in my mind, and the connection I made between them, or rather the connection that the stories made for me, resulted in my becoming a conscious Christian, a willing disciple of Jesus (at least attempting to be one).
- What I am today, a 73-year old priest and the father and grandfather in a family formed in conscious Christianity and willing discipleship, stems directly from that connection made between those two stories over a half-century ago,
- I have told these stories over the years repeatedly and in many ways, because it really is the heart of the story of my life lived in relationship with the Story of Jesus, the Gospel, the Good News of Christ. The stories are actually the two sides of Good Friday.

First the childhood episode. I was the age children are in first grade, six years. My father took me to a church (Lutheran I think) where there was a movie depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. It shattered me. "How could they do that to him? All he did was good" I thought, and cried to Dad in words I believe I can recall. I also recall Dad telling Mom he regretted taking me to see the

movie – too upsetting. Whatever else the movie did, I retained an attachment to the figure of Jesus, no matter all the ups and downs of faith that ensued.

And I don't regret the movie but rather thank God for it. Because in college, while studying for a quiz in a tough New Testament course, the vision of the crucifixion in that old movie revisited me so powerfully that I lost track of time. But this time, awful as the crucifixion is, I saw that it was Jesus's finest hour. More than that, as I looked at him in my mind's eye, I perceived that he was alive, living, and was appealing to me. I accepted the appeal.

And beginning then, I have not been the same since. For good reasons, the Lord did not show me the distant scenes (or I might well have run away), but he has kept my often-wandering steps in the way, and here I am now.

And here you are now. I have to assume that if you are watching this, you have the same interest in Jesus that I have. Why else are you watching? It is Good Friday, the day when the Church lifts high the cross so we each may look with the eyes of our minds to Jesus, to Christ crucified, who said concerning his crucifixion: "I, if I am lifted up from the earth (on the cross) will draw all men (women, children, people) to myself." **He will draw us.** There is that attachment to the figure of Jesus that I mentioned earlier while telling my childhood's first encounter with it.

So if you are watching and listening, my prayer for you, as it is for myself, is that you let your attachment to the figure, the Person, of Jesus become ever more an anchor to your soul. Let Jesus draw you to himself. Realize that the cross is most certainly Jesus's finest hour, his Victory over all that ails us. Because we would not speak this way about his crucifixion, we could not speak, were it not for the fact that the first disciples found Jesus's tomb empty; were it not for the fact that he began appearing to them from the other side of death, telling them that it was

necessary for the Christ to suffer and die as he did in order to defeat sin and death on their own terms.

I told you my story in order to help you see that your own story has every bit as much to do with the Gospel of Jesus as mine does. To help you see that Jesus appeals immediately and directly, even contemporaneously, to you, as he is lifted up on his cross.

Jesus Christ the Man of Sorrows is none other than Almighty God. His cross is God's cross. All the sufferings in the space and time of God's creation are borne in that cross. This fallen sad world, actually the whole creation, aches and groans for the redemption. What we see on Calvary in the crucified Son of God is what God has shown us. Sin and death have crowned their sad accomplishments in the cross of Jesus. They have done their very worst. But now they are spent. And Jesus, still bearing his glorious wounds, is risen, living, on the other side. That is why the day Christ died is called Good. Jesus has opened the gates of heaven. All that remains for us is that we allow him to take us through that door. Amen.