

This past Wednesday around noon, I received a phone call from a parishioner who asked if I could be with his family before his brother was taken off life support. As I made my way to the hospital, I prayed about what to tell the mother and siblings of that dying man. What could I possibly tell them to lessen their pain at such a difficult moment?

The Holy Spirit gave me just **two words**: Good Friday. The day when another mother watched her son die an early death. Good Friday: the day when suffering was transformed from pain to hope. Good Friday: the day that helped reopen heaven.

A lot of days have passed since God created the world, and one could argue that none is more important than Good Friday. I'll grant that Jesus' Resurrection defeated death for us, but it was His Crucifixion that showed the **extent** of His love for us.

In His humanity, Jesus faced a choice: die to earn forgiveness for our sins, or yield to temptation and forsake His mission in order to avoid the most horrific death He could imagine.

We know from Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels that Jesus **wanted** to walk away; that He got down on His knees and prayed: "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.*" Yet despite knowing the suffering He'd endure if He was obedient to His Father, His final prayer was: "*still, not my will but yours be done.*" Had He walked away, we'd have no victory over death.

Because of today, His sacrifice is about love, not death; forgiveness, not revenge. Today, mercy trumps justice. Today love is defined. Today makes yesterday irrelevant.

Today...we, like St. Paul, proclaim Christ crucified...a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ **IS** the sign of God and the wisdom of God.

That's why for Catholics, a sanctuary cross without Christ nailed to it denies the significance of the sacrifice He made for us. It wasn't pretty and it can't be...nor should it be...sanitized. Crucifixion, despite its intended purpose, became the means by which Jesus performed the greatest act of love of all time...turning his Crucifixion into a Divine love story.

On Sunday, that Crucifixion will become the beginning of that story instead of its end. Only then do we learn that God loves us **SO** much that He allowed His only Son to be sacrificed **on a cross** so that **ANYONE** who believes in Jesus might not perish but have eternal life...you...me...and that young man who died after being removed from life support.

Because of Good Friday and Easter, we no longer have to fear death because Jesus defeated it for us. Now, fear can be buried and we can be raised.

It's because of his **Crucifixion** that at Jesus' name, every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth. It's because of his **Resurrection** that every tongue must proclaim to the glory of God the Father: Jesus Christ **IS** Lord!

So believe, have hope and let your prayer today be just **four words**:

Thanks be to God!