



Homily for 4/2/2021

Good Friday

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

This liturgy begins with a prostration. Those who would approach God make themselves as low as they can be. It is a profoundly provocative gesture – its very action conveys meaning – *de profundis clamavi ad te domine* (from the depths I cried to you O Lord!) It is thus a powerful gesture in prayer. When you enter a wedding banquet, you are to seek the lowliest place, the Master tells us. There is no lowlier place than on the floor. Thus, there is no better place to be found by the God who seeks out the lowly and raises them up, than prostrate in prayer on the floor. This position of prayer was often used by Pope St. John Paul II. Every morning he would lie prostrate in prayer upon the floor of his chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. There are witnesses that report that he was known to spend hours, even the whole night, before the Tabernacle, lying prostrate with his hands stretched out in the shape of the cross. This is a very physical prayer. A very profound and powerful prayer. Where the body goes, there the heart follows. The more important part of the prayer is not the physical, but the spiritual. Lying on the floor with pride in the heart does nothing but make you dirty and uncomfortable. The humble heart, on the other hand, the Lord will not spurn. The prostration is meant to orient the heart to repentance, surrender, worship, and adoration. Mother church bids her children do just that on this day in which her beloved endured His Passion for us. This passion of His culminates with His suffering and death on the cross. The cross, then, becomes an object of adoration for the faithful. What a great mystery!

Of course, this is no dispensation from the first commandment, but rather a profound obedience to it. “I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods besides me,” says the Lord. Adoration and worship belong, by right, to God only. No human being, by right, gets adoration. Certainly, no object does. Except when Jesus is involved.

In Jesus Christ, God, who is rightly worshiped and adored, becomes man by taking on our flesh. We, then, are able to rightly worship and adore the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ without violating the first commandment. Aaron, even in the shadow of the Holy Mountain in the desert, falsely claimed, “Behold, here is your god,” of the molten calf he had fashioned from the gold of the people. To remedy this apostasy and idolatry, God commanded that there be a day of atonement. Now in Jesus Christ, the new priest, God boldly and truthfully gives us the ultimate atonement and the true object of worship: Jesus Himself and His sacrifice. *Ecce Agnus Dei*, “Behold, here is the Lamb of God”, John says by the river Jordan, thus eternally setting right the error of Aaron in the desert. In like manner, on this day, the priest presents to us the new altar of sacrifice – *Ecce Lignum Crucis*, “Behold the wood of the cross.” You will hear the new high priest, whose priesthood is eternal, speak through a man consecrated to be another Christ (*alter christus*). Though the solemn intoning of the *Ecce lignum crucis*, “Behold the wood of the cross,” the *alter Christus* points the faithful to the *altare Dei*, the altar of God – the cross of Christ.

For the people of the old covenant, the center of the world was the temple in Jerusalem. The whole Jewish world revolved around it. Jesus came to turn that whole world upside down. Or rather, He set the world on its proper axis – that it might turn rightly. The ancient Carthusian monks had this motto: *Stat Crux, dum volvitur orbis*; The cross stands firm while the world turns. “Tear down this temple,” Jesus says, “and in three days I will build it up again.” The new temple is the body of Christ - wherever it is extended throughout the world by its members. The new sacrifice is the flesh that shares in the nuptial one-flesh-union of the bridegroom and the bride. The new altar is His cross, wherever that body experiences it in its many forms. Before such a profound mystery the only proper disposition is to prostrate ourselves.

Our mother, the bride of Christ, the Church, calls us to adore the cross. We are called not to adore a piece of wood, as if in idolatry, but rather the altar of the new covenant, consecrated by the blood of God Himself. We adore not because of the wood but because of the divine blood soaked into it and the weight of salvation hung upon it. And so the Church bids us sing:

Lofty timber, smooth your roughness,
Flex your boughs for blossoming;



Let your fibres lose their toughness,
Gently let your tendrils cling;
Lay aside your native gruffness,
Clasp the body of your King!

Noblest tree of all created,
Richly jewelled and embossed:
(Door) Post by Lamb's blood consecrated;
Spar that saves the tempest-tossed;
Scaffold-beam which, elevated,
Carries what the world has cost!

Faithful Cross the Saints rely on,
Noble tree beyond compare!
Never was there such a scion,
Never leaf or flower so rare.
Sweet the timber, sweet the iron,
Sweet the burden that they bear!

This year we are asked to adore without the customary and traditional kiss. But we can still make the act of adoration by a Genuflection, a profound bow. Dare one make a prostration? There's time – *stat crux dum volvitur orbis*. This is not meant to be an empty gesture, nor a vain show. But if your heart so moves you – *venite adoremus*, “Come let us worship.”