

## GOOD FRIDAY – 2023

On this most solemn day of the entire year, we hear again St. John's account of the suffering and death of Jesus...and we hear this account only on Good Friday. John gives us some details not found in the other three gospels, and those details give us some further insight into what St. Paul wrote to the Philippians in the reading we heard on Palm Sunday: "Christ Jesus...emptied himself...to the point of death, even death on a cross." A brief reflection on three of these details, all of which occur on Calvary itself:

1. Only John tells us about Jesus entrusting his mother Mary and 'the disciple ...whom he loved' (John's way of referring to himself in his gospel) to each other. "'Woman, behold your son...Behold your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home." Consider Jesus dying his agonizing death, seeing his mother and his beloved disciple there and wanting to make sure that they will both be taken care of...and thus entrusting themselves to each other's care.

Have you ever been at the bedside of someone who is seriously or terminally ill? It often happens that that person knows that his/her loved ones are grieving and so they might say something like; "Don't worry about me; I'm in the loving hands of God. You'll need to take care of each other now when I'm gone." There's an 'emptying' process going on there in recognizing the reality of the dying process and thus wanting to help the loved ones see their need to help each other face it. That's what Jesus did in this act of generous love in giving the care of his Blessed Mother and his beloved disciple to each other.

2. A second detail found only in John's account: at the very end, after Jesus takes a bit of wine to slake his burning thirst, he says simply "It is finished"...and then 'he handed over the spirit'. In other words, he died. Death—the ultimate in self-emptying, and something that he freely accepted. On one level, we can truthfully say that Jesus could have saved us in any number of ways. As God the Son, he had the divine power to accomplish miracles of all kinds—healing the sick, calming stormy seas, and raising the dead among many others. But on Calvary, he emptied himself, poured himself out completely for our sake because he knew this was his Father's will for him and therefore for us. Don't try to understand this in mere human terms—you can't do it. But we can accept it with faith, trust, and gratitude. And that's just what Jesus wants for us.

3. Finally, John is the one who tells us that after Jesus was already dead, a soldier pierced the side of Jesus' body with a lance "...and immediately blood and water flowed out." Scientists and physicians tell us that makes biological sense; given all the extreme stress and pain that Jesus endured, those fluids would have collected around his lungs and heart. But there is an important symbolic meaning here as well that has been affirmed by many saints and theologians over the centuries. As the Catechism puts it: "the blood and water that flowed from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life" (n. 1225). Here the word 'types' means something that anticipates or looks forward to something else. Even in death, Jesus empties himself even further—that water and blood represent the saving power and grace of baptism by which we are washed clean of sin and of the Eucharist in which we are made more like Christ by receiving his Sacred Body and his Precious Blood in Holy Communion.

Jesus has done everything possible for us; there is nothing more he can give us because he has emptied himself entirely for the sake of our salvation and the hope of eternal joy. Do we know that truth? Do we remember that truth? Do we live daily in humble gratitude for the saving power of that truth? If not, why not?