

## Good Friday Homily

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by Fr. Gerry Murphy

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One of my earliest memories of Good Friday is that of my altar-serving days when, as a young altar server, I would carry a processional cross, flanked by two other candle-bearing altar servers as we made our way slowly around the Stations of the Cross in my local church. At each station we would pause, and the priest would lead the congregation in a prayerful meditation of that particular station. Each meditation concluded with the people responding: "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."

As I began preparing my Good Friday homily a week ago, I asked myself the question: "What do these words, taken from the Way of the Cross, mean outside their devotional context? How does Christ's cross redeem the world?" Is it right, I wondered, to attribute some glorious merit to the gruesome and violent death Jesus underwent for us? Is Jesus really the Suffering Servant of Isaiah who sheepishly and passively lays down his life in obedience to the will of a demanding father? What loving parent, I ask, demands his or her child's death before being willing to fix something that is broken.....even if it is the universe? No, this kind of theology does not sit well with me at all.

I'm sure many of you here went to see Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, over Lent. I also went to see it out of curiosity. Now I do not wish here to deliver some kind of treatise on what I thought of the movie. I don't wish, if you'll excuse the pun, to flog its controversial content to death. Our pastor, Fr. Brian, has spoken at length on this movie here at Christ the King, and around the diocese, and I'm sure you've read and listened to many debates on it. So let me just say why the movie missed the mark for me.

I found it to be a relentless fixation on the physical brutality and violence of Christ's passion. It seems to me that that is where it got stuck. So let me offer you a little corrective theology on the true meaning of redemption: we have not, as is commonly said, been redeemed by the 'bruises' and blood-shedding of Jesus. That is outdated and unhelpful atonement theology. The bruises and the scourging, the thorn-crowning and the mocking and everything that went into the Passion of Christ were the inevitable consequences of God's decision to restore loving communion with us. Let's imagine it this way: you are in a high-rise building that has suddenly become engulfed in flames. All hell breaks loose, and everyone makes for the exits. Once outside you suddenly realize that not everyone got out of the building. Your five-year old daughter is still trapped inside. Without a moment's hesitation you head straight back into the burning inferno and scale the flaming stairway to rescue your beloved child. Thankfully you rescue her and make it out of the building in the nick of time. She is fine but you have sustained some

serious burns which will leave you scarred for the rest of your life. Your child was rescued because of the tremendous love you had for her - a love that impelled you to risk life and limb and whatever it cost to rescue her.

One day God looked down on the world and thought: O dear, you guys need some serious rescuing. You have really gotten it badly wrong. You are you so filled with hate, so divided, so arrogant, so selfish, so lost. But I love you and I will now intervene and do whatever it takes to restore your broken friendship with me. Sadly and regrettably this cost God everything. He decided to leap into the burning inferno to reach his children caught in it. He got "burnt", "bruised", "wounded"; He died in the process, but rose from the dead because He is life, and because He has come to stay, to live among us forever. That is the true meaning of the Good News of Redemption.

The focus of Christian spirituality is the development of a living, loving, dynamic relationship with God centered on Jesus. Jesus was executed because he refused to stop loving; he refused to stop challenging the world's status quo. He seems to have known that his mission in life was to love without limits. His refusal to limit his love, his act of sacrifice, leads directly to the triumph of the cross. His love is absolutely free of selfishness and self-centeredness. Christ's cross redeems the world because it is the love that shines in the darkness, a darkness that cannot overcome it.