

In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

And so, we have come to the Foot of Calvary. After making the long journey of forty days through Lent, we come together to the foot of Christ's Cross, staring up at its bloody fruit—the sight of God made man hanging there mangled, bloodied, lifeless...the Author of Life, breathed His last in agony, virtually alone, and hated.

There is no escaping the ugliness of today's memorial and any attempt to do so cheapens the Sacrifice of Christ upon His Cross. Today, we remember that this isn't the God of sunshine and rainbows where "everything always works out" as we so often hear people say. Today, we remember that our God is one of reality—there *is* sin and sin disfigures; it harms; it is without rhyme or reason; it tears us apart; it destroys who we are; it affects the natural world around us; it has lasting and even eternal consequences. Yes, my brothers and sisters! *Sin. Is. Real.* The proof is in that tree—that Cross—and in its bloody fruit: the dead body of the Son of God. To say anything other than this is to deny reality and to cast as pointless the entire mission of our Redeemer—what need have we of a Redeemer if there is nothing to redeem us from? And so, today, the Church presents to us Christ upon His Cross to remind us that *we* placed Him there by our sins and we continue to do so every time we sin. St. John tells us in his first letter, "If anyone claims to be without sin, they are a liar." You and I are both very much in need of redemption because of our sin—our past sins, our current sins, our future sins, our major sins, our minor sins, our occasional sins, our recurring sins. Our sins haunt us, or at least they should, when we realize that even our smallest sins helped to create the ugliness of this day.

But Christ does not simply want us to recognize our sins and the fact that they were the cause of His greatest sufferings. He does not want us to simply wallow in our guilt. He wants us to recognize this truth—the reality of our sin—because it impels us toward its remedy. You see, Christ’s Cross is not merely the product of our sin; it is also its ultimate answer. Sin’s ultimate consequence is death—physical death, yes, but also spiritual death—separation from God forever. Adam and Eve’s first sin brought about man’s physical mortality, but also man’s spiritual mortality—they lost the greatest gift they had: communion with God. But no sooner had God pronounced, in justice, the consequences of that first sin did He promise its defeat: the promise of a Redeemer was granted. This Redeemer—Christ Himself—would remedy this impossible ailment by taking on all of its symptoms and ultimately, overcome all of them in glory. Christ’s physical suffering and death on the Cross is clearly His entrance into the realm of our own suffering and death, but we often miss that He also entered into the spiritual suffering and death that so plagues us. How? Sin’s spiritual consequences are loss of communion with God and that communion is restored by forgiveness—the Sacrament of Baptism and Confession—which we even see on that gruesome Mount of Calvary in the promise to the good thief, traditionally named St. Dismas—that He would enter into Paradise! Yes, even though our sins pierced the Sacred Heart of Christ upon His Cross, “all things work together for the good of those who love God”—*all things*, even the Cross itself. The penalty becomes the key to victory and why? “Behold, I make all things new,” He tells us.

The Church also presents to us the Cross of Christ because She reminds us of its necessity. We forget too easily how different this is from what we are told each and every day by almost every voice aside from Christ’s. The Truth is offensive, remain silent. Avoid the Cross. The beggar on

the corner is just an addict, look away. Avoid the Cross. Prayer is pointless and I get distracted so easily. Avoid the Cross. Chastity is too difficult, contracept. Avoid the Cross. Penance does nothing for us. Mass can wait; I have to take my kids to their soccer game and dance competition. My marriage is difficult; I don't love them anymore; divorce is an option. I'm not guilty of anything too major, I can go to Communion even though I haven't been to Confession in years. That litany goes on and on for each of us with our own temptations. Avoid the Cross. Avoid the Cross. Avoid the Cross. And why do these voices sound so appealing? Because at their root is the avoidance of suffering tied to the lie that suffering is without value. Avoid suffering at all costs—and so, avoid the Cross. But, we *cannot* avoid the Cross! It stands all around us—suffering is part of this world now since the Fall of Man. It *cannot* be avoided! Who of us here have not suffered? Who of us here comes to the Foot of Calvary without currently suffering? And yet, we give in so easily to that temptation and we are not alone. St. Peter himself fell into it when Christ announced that His glory would come in defeat and in the agony of the Cross and Christ had harsh words for His first Pope: “Get Thee behind Me, Satan! You are thinking as man does, but not God.” The Cross is essential to Christ's mission and it is essential to ours: “You *cannot* be My disciple *unless* you take up your Cross *daily* and follow after Me.” The Cross—suffering, difficulty, trial, hardship—is the price of our discipleship and we cannot approach the gates of heaven without the price of admission.

But, you see, here is where the greatest loss is, in my opinion. In all of the world's and Satan's lies and temptations to avoid the Cross, we have missed the single greatest part of this day. Remember when I said that Christ told us, “Behold, I make all things new?” Even the ugliness of this day, He transforms—but not without our first recognizing its ugliness. Christ clung to *His* Cross. He

grasped it, held onto it with divine energy and tenacious zeal! He kept it before Him in His public ministry and on the road to Calvary, He held onto it as His constant companion. Why? The Cross stands as the greatest reminder to us throughout the centuries of the unconquerable, unfathomable love of Almighty God! “No greater love has one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends!” The Cross stands as the eternal reminder that God loves us so much that He found our lives more valuable than His own! His wounded Flesh, His Precious Blood poured out from His fresh wounds, His lanced side, His pierced Hands and Feet, His torn shoulder, and wounded Head—all stand as perpetual reminders that Almighty God loves you. He loves *you!*

And so, as we sit in the shadow of the Cross, in sorrow and shame for what we have done to contribute to the horror of this day, we must remember what I have said throughout this season of Lent—that this demands a response. Don’t just walk away from today as if it were another Good Friday in a long string of Good Fridays. Everyone wants to hear that God loves them, but almost no one wants to look at what that love looks like! The love of Almighty God looks like the mangled body of His Son, lifeless upon a tree! And, my brothers and sisters, we cannot—we simply cannot—walk away from this unchanged. The Cross used to be the subject of hymns and poems and masterpieces of art, but now it fades into the background as we have lost a sense of its beauty, importance, and necessity. Our crosses entail suffering, to be certain, but they are also encounters with Love—the greatest love that mankind will ever know. And so great a God have we that He wants us to share in that unparalleled moment of love, by allowing us a share in His Cross—allowing us a share in that one anchor that remains amidst the shifting sands. Sit there in its silent shadow and meditate upon its strange, bloody fruit and soon, we shall treasure these

moments as deep encounters with Love. *Behold the wood of the Cross* and we will begin to see our anchor, our hope, and Almighty God's wondrous love.