

REFLECTION ON GOOD FRIDAY

by Fr. Tom

At the beginning of this Holy Week on Palm Sunday, we read a section of St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians. It spoke to us of God's love for us, the lengths to which He went to save us, and how Christ's OBEDIENCE was the operative element in the process: "***He emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.***"

Sin and selfishness entered the world through the DISOBEDIENCE of Adam and Eve, through their doing "their own thing." So.... the tree in the garden is a symbol the Fall. On the other hand, Redemption entered the world through the OBEDIENCE of Christ, his "doing the Father's will." So... the tree of the cross is a symbol of Salvation. This is the reason that, during the ceremony of the Veneration of the Cross, it is not the body on the crucifix that we honor, but the actual wood of the cross, when the celebrant sings: "***Behold, the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world!***"

Christ's DEATH and his RESURRECTION are two inseparable components of our salvation. Through his death Christ took away our sins and through his resurrection Christ has given us new life. The baptismal liturgy of the Easter Vigil brings these two events together and asks each one of us to personally commit to them through our renewal of our BAPTISMAL PROMISES.

Therefore, on Good Friday we emphasize the first part of the salvation that Christ won for us, namely: His victory over sin and evil, His freeing us from the power of sin, and His obedience to the Father's will and plan of salvation.

It is very essential that we realize that Christ's ACT OF OBEDIENCE was not a once-for-all event, not just something done at the moment of his crucifixion and death. Rather, it represents an entire life of sacrifice and obedience to the Father's will. The Passion and Death, therefore, are but the last of a series of obedient acts, and symbolic of Christ's entire life.

At the BEGINNING of his public ministry, Christ was tempted in the desert to: "do it his own way" or "to do it in the Father's way." (1) To turn stones into bread.

To use a "divine over-ride" to ease his hunger. (2) to jump from the parapet of the temple and have the angels swoop in a rescue Him. In other words, to be a popular messiah for the crowd. (3) Satan, the tempter, offers him all the kingdom of the world, if He would bow down to him. In other words, be a political messiah, which the repressed people would very much like and would be popular. Christ emphatically rejects all three temptations, as alluring and practical as they may seem, choosing rather to "do it" the Father's way, not his own. Christ said again and again: "***I have come to do the will of Him who sent me and not my own will.***"

DURING his ministry there was an interesting incident involving Peter. Jesus had just predicted his suffering and death. Peter strongly reacted to this, because it didn't fit into his then grandiose idea of what the Messiah should be. Jesus then reprimanded Peter: "***Get behind me, you tempter. You are not judging by God's standards, but by human standards.***"

AT THE END of his public ministry....just moments before his arrest and trial....Jesus was again tempted and he again triumphed and chose absolute obedience. He earnestly prayed from the depth of His human nature: ***Father, if you are willing, take this cup (of suffering) away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.***"

The second reading on Good Friday is from the Letter to the Hebrews. It summarizes very beautifully Christ's life here on earth among us, and it speaks of what OUR RESPONSE to his loving sacrifice should be.

In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help."

