

HOMILY FOR GOOD FRIDAY, 2019

+Augustine O. AKUBEZE
Archbishop of Benin City

INTRODUCTION

All Praise to God for the gift of his Son to humanity, who died on the cross to save us from sin and death. The liturgy today is about an event not a sacrament. Today the mystery of the cross is laid bare – we humble and prostrate ourselves before it and worship. Since the fourth century the Church has set aside Good Friday as a day to glory in the cross. As we spend time today reflecting on the inestimable love of God, we walked with Jesus through the way of the Cross. We heard the Passion Narrative and remembered all that Jesus suffered on this day. We venerate the Cross as the means of our salvation. And in all we remember that we call today “Good Friday” because God can bring good even out of the worst sufferings – if only we unite them to him and his Cross.

The way of the cross is a vivid reminder to us that Jesus is always with us: in the good times and the bad, through the joys and sorrows of life, he is always with us. The passion teaches us that whatever lies in our future, Jesus has been there first. Jesus did not die to save us from suffering. He died to teach us how to suffer – with complete faith and trust in God. When we are abandoned by friends, we remember that he was too. When we fall while carrying our cross, we remember that he fell too. When all seems hopeless at the death of a loved one, we remember that he died too. But in all these things he rose victorious, for the love of God conquers all things.

The cross is not a symbol of defeat. It is the reason for our hope. We are meant to glory in the cross of Jesus. We are called to rejoice in it, praise it and give God the honour, glory and adoration he deserves because of it. Today we rejoice in the cross, boast in the cross, celebrate the cross and glory in the cross. The cross of Jesus is a weapon against the enemy of our nature which drags us down and holds us in sin. The cross is a real power to help us live out our faith in the real world. Every blessing, every grace, every good gift is given to us in and through Jesus’ cross. And this is why as Catholics we glory in the cross. Every time the consecrated or blessed oils of the church are used sacramentally, we are anointed in the form of a cross. We begin almost every liturgy with the sign of the cross. We cross our foreheads, lips and hearts before the gospel is proclaimed with the sign of

the cross. The priest makes the sign of the cross over the bread and wine as God is called upon to miraculously change them into the body and blood of Jesus. When we are absolved of our sins, it is with the sign of the cross, when sacramentals are blessed it is with the sign of the cross, before we eat our meals we make the sign of the cross and bless the meal with the sign of the cross, we even hang crosses in our homes and wear it around our necks. The sign of the cross is in our catholic DNA.

If we ever doubt God's love for us, we need simply to look at a cross. Jesus shows us that he loves us that much. He shows us that our life, our salvation is worth dying for. In the agony in the garden that we heard in the passion narrative, we see that Jesus freely chose to die for us. He freely chose the passion because we are worth it. He was scourged for our sins and carried the weight of the cross because of our transgressions. He stretches his arms wide on the cross and opens his side to the lance, that he might pour out his abundant love upon you and me. That is Jesus' love for us – one of complete self-gift and self-sacrifice. If we ever doubt God's love for us, we need simply to look at a cross.

There are many times as we go through this life that we will suffer, that we will go through difficult times, that we are forced to carry a cross. But we never do this alone: Jesus has done it first and he is with us through all of our sufferings, all our trials and helping us to carry every cross. And even greater than just being with us, he will bring good out of all those situations – like he did with the cross – if only we will turn it all over to him.

As we meditate on the events of today let us join our hearts in praying with the Virgin Mary whom Christ gave to us to be our mother at the foot of the cross. That she may intercede for us as we carry our cross as disciples of her Son journeying towards our heavenly homeland. We pray that God will give us the grace to carry our cross and follow him whole heartedly through Christ our Lord. May our sacrifices and good deeds throughout the Lenten season not be in vain through Christ our Lord.

We adore you O Christ and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world!

May God bless you all!