3 Lent B 2024

In the Holy Land, torn apart by strife and division, there are many shrines honoring places and events in the life of Jesus, some are of doubtful authenticity. But the location of the Mount of Calvary is so well confirmed that it admits no reasonable doubt. How right it is that we should know the exact spot where Jesus was lifted up on the cross to draw all to His pierced heart.

The suffering of Christ on Calvary is at the heart of our faith. Why did Jesus suffer? How can I “proclaim Christ crucified” in ways that give hope?—that we have been redeemed through the passion of Christ. The Father willed that Jesus sacrifice His body for us on the cross to take away our sins. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us it was prophesied of Jesus that on coming into the world He would say, *“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me…then I said, as it is written in the book, I have come to do Your will, O God.”*

Jesus carried out that will of the Father by offering His own body, for love of us, through death on the cross. It was this sacrifice of His body—the true Temple of God—that Jesus was foretelling in today’s Gospel where he says, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”*

Salvation through suffering was a scandal in Jesus’ day. Jewish people demanded signs and wonders, and Greeks demanded saving wisdom. Neither recognized the wonder and the wisdom of a suffering Savior. They refused belief in a God who loves us beyond all our hopes and desires, a God who loves us enough to take upon Himself our flesh and die for our redemption. Acceptance of the discipline of Lent requires us to face up to our sinfulness.

Let us not resist the mystery of redemptive suffering. Jesus involves us also in the work of redemption. We contribute to it as well as benefit from it. At the time of our baptism Christ prepares us to participate in His redemptive suffering. St Paul says, *“Have this mind among yourselves which was in Christ Jesus who emptied Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*” St Cyprian, who, as bishop, established the important principle of the Church’s discipline of penance, and who said, *“The sacrifice of our Lord is not complete as far as our sanctification is concerned unless our offerings and sacrifices correspond to His passion.”*

How do we put the mystery of suffering into practice? By accepting the troubles and trials that come from living life faithfully: the suffering of resisting sin, the suffering of work, the suffering of sickness, the suffering involved in family problems, and all we have to bear from one another. We can cry out with Jesus in His agony, *“Father, take this cup away,”* but we must add with Jesus, *“Yet, not what I will, but what You will.”*

The mystery of suffering also means freely and generously placing penances of our own to share in the fasting and watching and prayer of Christ. It is the vision of the Beatitudes, the code of Jesus’ own life and ours as well: we are to be poor in spirit and not greedy, to sorrow over the world’s evils and not just our own, to be meek and not domineering, to be pure of heart and God’s children and His peacemakers, to turn the other cheek, to suffer violence with Christ without growing violent in return.

The wisdom of a suffering Savior. There is no Christianity without the Beatitudes. They are the Father’s plan, lived by the Son, and passed on to us. There’s no doubt about it: the Beatitudes demand suffering*—“Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you.”* We see today a determination to meet war and violence with war and violence. Disadvantaged peoples are disheartened, terror hangs the world over.

Why did Jesus suffer? God the Father wishes this perishable nature to put on imperishability, and this mortal nature to put on immortality. Jesus accomplishes this by sacrificing His own life. In this way, Jesus becomes *our High Priest,* entering into a new Holy of Holies—*the sanctuary of His own body,* offering there this new sacrifice—keeping the Father’s will, loving even His enemies infinitely more that they would hate Him.

Let us end at the Altar. Our bread and wine will become Christ’s body and blood, once separated for us, but now risen and immortal. Let us put our own bodies and wills on the paten with Christ, ready to go the way of the cross with Him for the good of all.

Together with St Francis, let us *“give praise, glory, honor and blessing to Him who suffered so much, who has given and will give in the future every good, for He is our power and strength, who alone is good, who alone is almighty, who alone is omnipotent, wonderful, glorious and who alone is holy, worthy of praise and blessing through endless ages. Amen.”*

