Good Friday – April 14, 2017

“The Cross and the Dark Night of Glory”

Isaiah 52:13–53:12
Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
John 18:1-19:42

Tonight we commemorate and are called, ourselves, to enter into the darkest night of all time: darker even, in a sense, than the darkness before creation. Tonight the Light of the World has been removed from our eyes because the shroud of sin has enveloped it. From our first ancestors to our last descendants, the specter of sin obscures the Light of Christ before our eyes. But tonight, the torch of God’s infinite goodness appears to be extinguished completely. For those who witnessed and experienced this night, even hope, the glowing ember of The Light, was extinguished. We however with the benefit of history, scripture and Tradition know that this is not the case. We have entered into and commemorate this night in order to contemplate the mystery of God’s plan of salvation. God shows us that light will come from this darkness and will be brighter and more pure than before. In addition, the source of that light will come from the wooden torch of the cross, transforming the instrument of death and darkness into the instrument of Light and the source of our redemption and the means to a new creation. In several short
hours that will seem like the eternity that preceded it, this new creation, this new beginning, this glorified completeness will rise with the sun to begin the eighth and final day of creation.

But tonight we are called to enter into this darkness in order to reflect on the events of Christ’s Passion and death on the cross, on the love with which he endured it and the sins of ours that contributed to it. But if we ONLY view this night as kind divine recompense without a promise, then we miss the point altogether. Jesus reminds us earlier in the Gospel of John that “the Son of Man [must] be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

This is accomplished through Jesus’s death because is leads to His resurrection. Jesus didn’t just die to pay the price of our sins, he died to redeem them and to give us a means to restore ourselves from the effects of sin. By rising from the dead Christ defeated the death that our sins brought about and transformed the Cross from an instrument of fear, torture, humiliation and death into the instrument our hope, joy, pride, divine justice and eternal life. Therefore, death, which was brought about by the sin of Adam and Eve via a tree, was overcome by the wood of a tree, the cross, thereby turning the Cross into the symbol of Christ’s victory, not His defeat.
It is precisely THIS victory, won on behalf of the entire human race, that has made the Cross such a powerful image for those who follow Christ and is why we venerate the Cross as we will here tonight, shortly. Equally as important though, is that the Cross also represents the manner in which we follow Christ. By facing the challenges of life with the same love and determination that motivated Jesus to pick up and endure hardship, pain, rejection, humiliation and death that the Cross inflicted, we actively unite ourselves to his sacrifice in order to share in THIS victory. We call it “picking up OUR Crosses” and although carrying our crosses can be difficult and often painful, it becomes a way of lightening the burden of our sins and an opportunity to help Jesus carry the cross we ultimately helped give him.

Tonight, as we share in the remembrance of Christ’s death that cast the world into the deepest darkness, let us also remember that this is part of the mystery of God’s plan that will ultimately lead to the dazzling brilliance of our sanctification won by the victorious and Holy Cross. Unlike those who experienced this night first-hand however, we are given hope. We know that the sun will rise and once more shine its light on the third day as the Son rises to shed His light on the third day. “By His wounds we were healed”; by accepting and understanding this we can see this night as the beginning of OUR hope instead of the end of it. This is the reason we enter into this dark night and why we venerate the Holy Cross: so that
we will always be reminded that it is through death that we receive life and that the Light of Christ will never again be overcome by the darkness of life and the world in which we live. On this night, our hopes hang on The Cross in this Dark Night of Glory.