We come together today to immerse ourselves in the passion and death of Jesus Christ: to raise our awareness of Good Friday both as it happened historically to Jesus over 2000 years ago and as it continues to happen today to millions of people who are the body of Christ. And we come to lift high and venerate the cross as a symbol of Christ’s victory.

The historic crucifixion according to John seems to show Jesus oddly enough in charge. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus goes out to meet his captors. He does not resist. He restrains Peter’s attempt to hold them back. And in the Roman courts Pilate feels that Jesus is innocent – but Jesus seems to refuse to take advantage of it. Jesus has also forced Pilate to panic over the possibility of reports reaching the emperor that the Jews are more loyal to Rome than he is. By being himself and speaking truth, Jesus has brought about the crucifixion. Hence, he even takes control from the cross saying, “It is finished,” deliberately “handing over” his spirit.

When many of us were young, on first hearing about Jesus’ passion, we might have fantasized, “If I had been there, I would not have let it happen.” John’s Gospel suggests Jesus wouldn’t have wanted that. But Jesus could hardly have been more emphatic in identifying himself with all of us today and through all time; as members of the body of Christ. He does want us to be present to those in his body today who are suffering.

In his painting, “The Erection of the Cross,” the Dutch master Rembrandt portrays the final moments of preparation before the condemned Jesus is hoisted upon the cross. In the painting, the man raising the cross is dressed in contemporary clothing of the artist’s time. Though he never spoke about it or offered any explanation, those who knew Rembrandt recognized the man in the painting immediately: the man raising up the cross is Rembrandt himself.

Rembrandt’s making himself one of the actors in Jesus’ passion is more than just clever arrogance or an artist’s eccentricity: it is an act of humble faith; recognition that each one of us plays a role in the crucifixion of Christ that is repeated all around us in acts of violence, injustice and hatred.
Since we began this liturgy, approximately 100’s of our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ from around the world have become refugees; over 10 or more every minute. Earth has more refugees now than after the Second World War. This does not include the homeless in our own country who, at any given time, number over a half million. Fifty percent of them are over 50, many of them veterans.

We are often paralyzed by two demons: one is the sheer enormity of some problems. When a social problem becomes massive, surprisingly, it tends to become invisible. It’s like a huge, towering building we walk next to every day. Soon we are hardly aware it’s even there. The second demon is, “What can I do about it? I’m just one person.”

Few of us can work on the front lines or in the trenches of these and other problems in our world. But all of us have a few extra bucks or means of support or time for extra prayers to support those who do. All of us can take a lesson from Saint Teresa of Calcutta, she didn’t solve poverty or sickness; she simply rescued and treated one sick, impoverished person at a time.

Easter morning will not – cannot – dawn until the events of Good Friday are played out to completion. We cannot hope to experience rebirth and transformation in our own lives until we “empty” ourselves of our self-centered wants and “crucify” those attitudes and approaches that make us less than what we want to become in the eyes of God.

As we relive the story of Jesus’ final hours and death during this Sacred Paschal Triduum, may our prayers this week be that God will give us the grace to overcome the inclination to be judging Pilates and become, instead, Josephs of Arimathea, making Christ’s body our own. May we not be builders of crosses but angels who roll back the stone and proclaim the good news of Christ’s resurrection!

So as we receive Our Lord in the gift of the Eucharist today and every day, let us thank Jesus for his sacrifice of self and pray for those whose Good Friday is still going on.