Why do we affectionately refer to today as Good Friday, if this is the day we commemorate the passion and death of our Blessed Savior?

To answer that question, while yes, today is certainly solemn and sorrowful, it is also the long awaited day of salvation.

The fundamental shape of salvation history is Nuptial...what do I mean by that? It is marriage-like. God’s ultimate plan, His big picture, is to wed Himself to humanity in an everlasting marital covenant. Have you ever thought of salvation history in that way? You should if you have read the Bible.

Sacred Scripture begins and ends with a wedding.

If you remember, on the First Sunday of Lent, we listened to the beginning of Sacred Scripture, the Book of Genesis, and the creation of Adam and Eve. At that moment, God wrote the plan of salvation, he wrote the love story of salvation, into creation itself, when making man and woman. He was already telling us the love story that he would fulfill in human history. God put Adam into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs and closed it up with flesh. This rib He had taken from the man, God made into a woman and brought her to the man; and Adam said: “Finally, this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man; therefore a man leaves his father and clings to his wife and the two become one flesh.” That is the mystery of the marital covenant of marriage. That is God’s first act with mankind. In that moment, God is already telling us the whole history of humanity.

Just one of the many reasons to the significance of Lent being 40 days long, is to remember the Exodus. To remind ourselves of our ancestors in faith who wandered in the desert for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land. So, on the Third Sunday of Lent, we were with Moses and we remembered all the incredible miracles and signs God performed to help liberate the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and to help them to understand that His love for them was unending.

The prophet Ezekiel, whom we heard speak to us on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, gave the Israelites a better understanding to the Exodus of their forefathers. Ezekiel says, “And you Israel grew up, and became tall, and arrived at full maidenhood. When the Lord passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you and I covered your nakedness. Yay, I plighted my troth to you and I entered into a covenant with you and you became mine. And I decked you with ornaments, and put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring in your nose, rings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.” This is all imagery of a Jewish bridegroom preparing his bride for the wedding. So the Exodus was more than just an episode of tremendous signs and emancipation, it was also the moment when God again betrothed himself to Israel.
Ezekiel goes on to tell his people however that they have committed adultery against God, they have been unfaithful to Him, because they have gone on to worship foreign false gods. Throughout the Old Testament this becomes a recurring problem, and whenever Israel falls into that sin and the prophets through the centuries call them back, remind them again that they are the beloved chosen people of God and to be faithful again to their covenant with God.

If we move ahead in salvation history to the greatest and last of the prophets, what do we hear St. John the Baptist say as he is baptizing people in the Jordan river: “I am not the bridegroom; I have been sent before the Messiah. He who has the bride is the bridegroom. I am the friend of the bridegroom who stands and rejoices greatly at the sound of the bridegroom’s voice.” John is telling us that he is just the best man of a wedding that is about to take place.

What is the very first sign which Jesus performs to begin his public ministry? The miracle at the wedding feast in Cana; in changing the water into wine. Why is this his first sign?

While we cannot exhaust the mystery of God, we nevertheless recognize that this miracle at Cana points to the Cross and to the Eucharist. In performing this sign Jesus is signaling to us that fundamentally His mission is to wed Himself to His people. He is going to establish an everlasting covenant through the offering of bread and wine and the sacrifice of the Cross. Where is the Cross at Cana? Remember that our Lord first protests to His mother, telling her that “my hour has not yet come.” Jesus is foretelling of the hour of the Eucharist and the hour of the Cross. Jesus always talks of both of them together.

At a wedding, it was the responsibility of the bridegroom to provide the wine, so who was the bridegroom of the wedding at Cana? Jesus Christ. Jesus showed us through this sign, that it is precisely in the Eucharist and the Cross where He will become the bridegroom.

In the synoptic Gospels this is affirmed. The Pharisees question him as to why his disciples do not fast. And he tells them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. They days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day...And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost...but new wine is for fresh skins.” (Mk 2:19-20)

Well, what day was the bridegroom taken away? On the Cross, on Good Friday. The day on which the bridegroom and the Messiah will be taken away from the wedding guests and then they will fast. This is why we fast today, this is why we always do penance on Fridays!

But this is also the day of consummation.
Last night, the Church celebrated the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, and in the Holy Gospel from John we heard, to set the scene, that Jesus inaugurated the Last Supper, when He “knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (13:1)

Now fulfilling what was hinted at in Cana, on Holy Thursday night, Jesus is truly being the bridegroom who is taking wine and establishing a covenant with the one whom he loves, His bride, which is symbolized by the twelve apostles, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what Ezekiel has promised and Isaiah had prophesied. The marital covenant established that night by Jesus and His Church, the New Israel is founded upon and centered in the Eucharist.

Now, this has great importance to what we commemorate today. If we describe salvation history as having a nuptial dimension, like a marital covenant. Then today, on Good Friday, is the precise day in which Christ’s bond to His Bride, the Church, is made an unbreakable bond.

At the climax of the Passion from John, we heard the following: “So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of the skull. There they crucified him...after this, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the Scripture: “I thirst.” A bowl of common wine stood there; so they put a sponge full of the wine and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the it, he said, “It is finished;” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Again I ask, do you see a wedding here? Do you see the goodness and joy in that moment? Can you find the nuptial covenant that Jesus is making on the Cross?

First, at the Last Supper, Jesus has established a wedding feast. It is his own wedding banquet. Today, on the Cross, Jesus completes the Jewish Passover meal by drinking of the fourth cup of wine, which the Jews called the “Cup of Consummation”, and he even exclaims, “It is finished.” Consumatum est! It is consummated. What is consummated? The Last Supper Sacrifice and the Covenant is established, He has now wed Himself to his Bride, the Church, in His Own Blood.

Like Adam, who as he slept from his own flesh was Eve created, that was just a mere glimpse of what is occurring today on the Cross! The Catechism explains this so beautifully in paragraph 1067: ““The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. ...For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth ‘the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.’"
Our Savior submitted to the sleep of death upon the wood of the Cross so that his body and blood might be given up to create his beloved bride, His Church.

At the beginning of this homily, I mentioned how Scripture also ends with a wedding. At the end of time, as St. John relates to us in the Book of Revelation, in Heaven there will be the experience of the awesome wedding feast. Celebrated by the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and his Bride, the Church Triumphant. The Angel tells John to write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

What do you see when you look at a crucifix? Do you see the Bridegroom? Do you see that nuptial mystery? Do you see a wedding?

What do you see every time that you look upon the Sacred Host, the Eucharist at Holy Mass? Do you see a bridegroom’s love for his bride?

The deepest meaning of both the Cross and the Eucharist is God’s absolute, ever-lasting, undying, unchanging, total-self, covenantal love for every single one of us he ever made. That is the deep beauty and mystery of the Catholic faith.

Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world. Come let us adore!

Resources:

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told by Brant Pitre