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Bishop of Rapid City**

GOOD FRIDAY HOMILY

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

April 6, 2012

We continue the liturgy of last night as we gather on this day. The GREAT PARADOX .....the suffering and death of a man on a cross.....and the gift we call Good Friday.

For us we see more than .....a man Isaiah describes... *“no stately bearing to make us look at him, no appearance that would attract us to him”*.....betrayed, abandoned, arrested, denied, accused, judged, condemned, stripped, scourged, abused, degraded, mocked, jeered, pierced, nailed to a cross.

We gather to venerate that cross on which hung the Savior of the world. We continue to be drawn into *“the mystery of an unbounded love, namely the mystery of Christ who, ‘having loved his own in the world, loved them to the end.’”* My dear friends, we are those whom He has loved. We cling for dear life to this mystery.....Jesus freely offering His life.....for you and me.

It began last evening with Jesus giving of Himself, His Body and Blood at the Passover meal, the washing the feet of his disciples and giving the *mandatum*, *“If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.”* Now today the washing of the feet of the disciples is brought to its fullest meaning – and to a conclusion. The act of love of yesterday is today most fully expressed on Calvary.

*“The wood of the cross that we venerate today is the ultimate humility for God. It is the symbol of the covenant God made with humanity. God descends into the full depravity of the human condition, carries the full weight of our sinfulness, experiences the full weakness of its flesh, the total disgrace of the judgment, condemnation, suffering, death and burial that is the destiny of all people. In return, humanity gets the total experience of divinity: freedom from death and the glory of everlasting life with God.”*

Though this is the ultimate humility for God, the cross of Jesus Christ is also a sign of His victory and glory. The words of the entrance antiphon of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper last night: *“We should glory in the cross of Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life, and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered.”*

**TODAY WE HAVE A REASON FOR REJOICING.....  
.....JESUS’ UNEQUIVOCAL AND DEFINING LOVE FOR US.**

In the Cross of Jesus Christ, the very heart of God is displayed. Our sinfulness is defeated by love. The power of Satan has been destroyed. Our eternal death is brought to the glory of eternal life. Here the very heart and desire of the Father is revealed. While the arms of Jesus are opened on the cross to embrace us, the gift of Good Friday must be accepted with open and trusting hearts.

But why is it so difficult for the world to embrace it, to accept it, to rejoice in it? Perhaps it is because the world doesn't understand love and the truth about REAL love...what it entails, what it looks like, what it can accomplish.

Jesus loved radically unto the end. Have we ever known a greater love? Have you ever known a more radical love? In contemplating this love whose fulfillment is the gift of life, John Paul II said, *"The cross is the clear sign of this mystery of love, and at the same time, it becomes a symbol that challenges and disquiets our consciences."*

We are forced to look inside ourselves. When you reflect upon the cross....this mystery of love.....how are you challenged? How have your conscience and my conscience become disquieted or troubled?

But this is our story. This story of the cross and redemption is our story. Fr. Richard John Neuhaus said, *"Every human life, conceived from all eternity and destined to eternity, here finds its story told. In this killing that some call senseless we are brought to our senses. Here we find out who we most truly are, because here is the one who is what we are called to be."*

In the truth of this story, we come to know the truth about ourselves.....people who have wandered from home....people who have turned it on ourselves and are afraid to let go of our lives, so that we can truly become His disciples.....people who are hesitant to follow on His terms.

A survivor of the Nazi holocaust summed up the feelings of millions when he said: *"As I look at the man on the cross...I know I must make up my mind once and for all and either take my stand beside him and share in his undefeated faith in God or else fall into a bottomless pit of bitterness, hatred and unutterable despair."*

So when you and I look upon the Crucifix, do we come to the same conclusion? Does it demand of us a commitment? Are we just onlookers, followers at a safe distance or are we committed to Jesus as the Lord of Life and Hope?

For all of us, regardless of our vocation in life, but especially for priests and those who aspire to holiness, Jesus' story must become our story. How can we preach Christ crucified if this story of the cross and redemption does not become our own story? As St. Paul says to the Galatians, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* (Gal 2:20) Christ's story has become Paul's story. Christ's story must become our story. Do we have the courage to pray for this grace? If so, it will radically change our lives.

Faith in the crucified Lord calls us to crucify our own flesh with its desires, in order to share in Christ's death and resurrection (Gal 5:24). In accepting the weakness of the Cross, we experience the power of God's love for us.

As mentioned earlier, in the Cross of Jesus Christ, the very heart of the Father is revealed. There is great power there. We gather tonight to accept the gift of Good Friday with open and trusting hearts.

Jesus befriended His death because He knew what would become of it. Jesus did not befriend the suffering that led to His death because suffering in itself is of value, but because “LOVE WITHOUT RESTRAINT REQUIRES SUFFERING. WE ARE SAVED, NOT BY THE PHYSICAL DEATH OF JESUS BUT BY THE ABSOLUTENESS OF A LOVE WHICH DID NOT COUNT SUFFERING AND DEATH TOO HIGH A PRICE.” (Anthony Padovano, *Who is Christ?*)

Such a gift we have been given!!!!

So it was not the nails in His hands that killed Jesus.....it was His love for us;

It was not the nails in His feet that gained for us the forgiveness of sins.....it was His love for us;

It was not His pierced side that gained for us eternal life.....it was His love for us;

A LOVE WHICH HAS SHOWN NO LIMITS OR BOUNDARIES,

A LOVE WHICH GIVES US COURAGE AND STRENGTH IN OUR WEAKNESS,

A LOVE WHICH GIVES US HOPE AND CONSOLATION  
IN OUR OWN SUFFERING AND IN OUR OWN DEATH, AND

A LOVE WHICH BRINGS US TO OUR KNEES IN REVERENCE AND VENERATION

as we “*Behold the wood of the cross on which hung the Salvation of the world.*”