

Good Friday Homily *Have mercy on me O God in Your kindness*
Cathedral of Saint Paul/ March 25, 2016
Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5: 7-9; John 18:1-19:42

“Have mercy upon me, O God, in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offense.”

That the Lord in his great mercy “blots out” our sins is amazing enough. But that he freely chose to do so by means of his self-sacrifice on the Cross is beyond the power of human words. Perhaps this is why countless composers have tried to bring this reality to life through music, none perhaps more hauntingly than that which you will hear a little later during this liturgy.

The masterwork of a 17th century composer named Gregorio Allegri, the “Miserere” is a 19 verse setting of Psalm 51, the most familiar of the seven Penitential Psalms, with its opening line, “Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness...” So taken by its beauty, the Pope at the time, Urban VIII, decreed that it be sung exclusively for worship in the Sistine Chapel during Holy Week.

Tradition recounts that it was forbidden to copy the score, under pain of serious church penalty. The ornamentation was never written down, but merely passed down from singer to singer. That pope’s decree lasted about 150 years, when in 1730, a precocious fourteen-year-old is said to have copied it down himself after hearing it just twice in person. The teenager was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and far from being punished, the pope praised him!

Today, as you venerate the Cross, the silence of Good Friday is only broken by the poignant, melodic, sublime, evocative and above all, mysterious melody. The mystery of the Cross is placed before us in all its profundity this afternoon.

The haunting melodies of Good Friday cannot mask the pain from knowing that we are the cause of His suffering. It is but a human attempt to break the harsh silence of this day. We hear the cries and wails to the very core of our being, and yet therein we find life's greatest paradox.

He, who died a cruel death at our hands, has by that very same death made any joy we experience in life possible. And yet we feel nothing but emptiness today. Three times the celebrant chants, "Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Savior of the World." No matter how much we try, we cannot possibly imagine what the disciples who remained in Jerusalem after the crucifixion must have been thinking and experiencing.

In our darkest days of abandonment, whether due to family problems, work or school related disappointments, or spiritual struggles, we know that our Lord has triumphed over sin and death and has conquered them once for all. Yet, we still doubt, wait and wonder for a better day ahead.

Did it have to be this way? Could our redemption have been won some other way, less severe, without the pain and suffering? Christ's death is the sacrifice that completes and surpasses all other sacrifices, and is indeed "the source of eternal salvation."

Indeed, the Cross is our only hope, for it is precisely at the Cross, that the mystery of the divine Trinity is fully proclaimed. The Lord Jesus enters into our forsakenness, following the will of the Father, with the fire of divine love burning up sin, triumphing over death once for all.

Today with our prayers, let us wait and endure the darkness. Let us deign to bear a tiny particle of the suffering of the Cross with our love, which once purified, may lead us through Calvary, past the darkness, to the everlasting light of glory.