

Good Friday Homily
The Cathedral of Saint Paul
April 19, 2019 3:00 p.m.

Today, at this hour, the earth stands still. Our Savior has entered into the depths of his suffering, experiencing untold agonies for love of us. The focus of Good Friday is appropriately on the agony of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So many have prayed the Stations of the Cross with us on Fridays, as well as earlier this afternoon. And yet, we can consider that agony from any number of perspectives, including the tremendous agony the Blessed Mother experienced standing at the Foot of the Cross.

Immortalized in a poem from the Italian Middle Ages, the *Stabat Mater* has been put to music by some of the world's greatest composers including Haydn, Vivaldi, and Gounod. It is often sung at Stations.

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing
all His bitter anguish bearing,
now at length the sword has passed.

Known by its Latin title *Stabat Mater*, the hymn is attributed to a young 13th century poet from Umbria named Jacopone da Todi. A great feast was being celebrated in the town of Todi- today, about an hour's drive from Assisi, Italy. Suddenly the viewing stand from which his wife Vanna was witnessing the tournament gave way, crushing her. When Jacopone rushed to her side, she was dying. Both the shock caused by her tragic death and the evidence of bodily mortifications she endured for his sins, made such an impression on Jacopone, that he was changed forever.

Born from the crucible of his own suffering, Jacopone's poignant hymn gives voice to the indescribable pains suffered by our Blessed Mother. While we may never experience such a personal tragedy, we try to imagine our Lady's horrific suffering and see how her sorrow is in part due to us.

It is a nearly universal experience to feel shame on account of letting down one's mother. Even when weakened through pride or frailty, we seek the loving embrace of one's mother.

As Christians, our collective emotions and thoughts are difficult to hold in check as we meditate upon the sorrowful Passion of our Lord.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
all His bitter anguish bearing,
now at length the sword has passed.

When the sword of sorrow pierces our heart, the emotional pain can be devastating. Earlier this week, millions watched in horror on live TV as the magnificent Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was engulfed in flames. Did we not in fact weep for our Lady, in whose honor the Cathedral was built? The pain is intense, the sorrow genuine, the sense of loss palpable.

But when our pain is due to the realization of our own sinfulness, we feel something even deeper. We feel shame. We feel as though we stand with Judas, betraying our Savior. When the pain is due to a difficult family situation, whether marital or with respect to unfulfilled dreams, financial straits, strained relationships with children or parents, the pain is all too real. When the pain is due to the suffering of another, for which we can do little or nothing to alleviate, it is unbearable. How could we stand by idly, stone-faced, unmoved?

<i>Quis est homo qui non fleret,</i>	Is there one who would not weep
<i>matrem Christi si videret</i>	Whelmed in miseries so deep
<i>in tanto supplicio?</i>	Christ's dear Mother to behold?

So how does meditating upon the Cross help us? Does it not merely make things worse? Does misery truly love company? Far from being a sign of weakness, as some would have it, our tears are at once tears of profound gratitude. We are *overwhelmed by the love* that made our salvation possible. Even should our selfish sense of justice cry, "But it is not MY fault," or "I did not crucify Him," we know in the deep recesses of our heart that we did and that we still do.

Jacopone invites us to meditate upon the Mother of Christ in her agony, seeing that this too would move us to tears. While his contemporaries may have struggled with the effects of his conversion, for 750 years this profound meditation has moved Christians to a greater love for the Cross. We cling to the Cross and avail ourselves of its power to heal.

The beauty of our Catholic Faith is in part due to its communal nature; we suffer together, we bear the burden together. Good Friday is the great equalizer...all of us, young or old, pious or pensive, fervent or fickle, zealous or tepid for the Faith, we gather here at this hour, in this sacred space, to venerate the Cross that has made possible our salvation. As we have done so many times before, once more, we beg the assistance of our loving Mother in heaven:

Make me feel as thou hast felt;
make my soul to glow and melt
with the love of Christ my Lord.