

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
GOOD FRIDAY
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
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My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and Religious, Seminarians, Members of the Cluster of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral Parish, and my Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

In today's solemn Good Friday services, we remember and experience anew the mystery of Christ's perfect love for the Father and all of us. As a way of reflecting on this mystery, I would like to use the motto of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, founded by Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau – "*Ave Crux, Spes Unica*" or in English, "Behold the Cross, Our Only Hope."

The voice of the world around us and the feelings of fear within us again and again resist the gift and mystery of the cross. Whenever suffering comes our way, our instinctive human reaction is to try to avoid it or, at best, minimize it. From the perspective of our culture, it is completely illogical to speak of the cross as a reason for hope.

Yet, that is the very reason we gather here this afternoon: we believe that by His obedient death upon the cross, Christ shows us that death is not to be feared. It will not have the last word. In fact, the cross is actually something about which we

can boast, a reason for hope, confidence, and courageous witness. This day, and every day, as Christians, we are challenged to lift high the cross of Jesus Christ, for it is indeed the means of our salvation, our one true hope.

In his encyclical on Christian hope published a few months ago, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI describes Christ's cross as "*hope-in-action.*" He explains: "*We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering by withdrawing from anything that might involve hurt, when we try to spare ourselves the effort and pain of pursuing truth, love, and goodness, that we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater. It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather, by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it, and finding meaning through union with Christ who suffered with infinite love" (Article 37).*

On this day, in union with the Mother of our Lord and the Beloved Disciple, we stand at the foot of the cross. That is where we belong – looking up at the mystery of the God who completely exposed Himself to human rejection and humiliation, a God stretching down toward us with compassion and mercy. We are challenged not to run away but to remain faithful, patient and hopeful. We are challenged to reaffirm anew our conviction that all life, grace and meaning, hope and peace, are discovered only here, under the shadow of the cross. Any other

form of hope is an illusion, something false and unable to satisfy us. We have been made for love and will find hope and meaning only by accepting the loving mercy of Jesus Christ.

Together, at the foot of Christ's cross, we see God's love made fully manifest. We begin to see and understand God's hope for us, His plan of salvation, His desire to draw all of us into communion with Him and each other. We also come to appreciate and understand the potential and goodness that God sees in us, His confidence that we are capable of responding to Him – heart-to-heart. The more we gaze upon the cross of Jesus Christ, the more we can find consolation and strength as we deal with our own daily struggles.

Compared to the trauma of all Christ experienced, our own crosses pale by comparison. Furthermore, united to His cross, our sufferings of body and spirit take on a new meaning and power; they become a means for our salvation and that of the whole world.

As Pope Benedict XVI explains, humans can accept suffering if we can find some meaning or purpose for it. On the cross, Christ teaches us – even by His silence – that suffering for others is the perfect expression of love. Our own suffering, and that of others, makes sense only within the context of love. Put another way, the choice to love or to be loved necessarily includes the possibility –

even the inevitability – of suffering. A life without love will still have suffering, but a life full of love makes the suffering tolerable, even hope-filled and positive.

With Christian faith, we see our own daily sufferings in terms of a larger picture, understanding that we are called to suffer with and for one another just as Christ came to suffer and die for us. We do so with hope and confidence, for we understand that as we are one with Christ in His dying, we will also be one with Him in His victory. Consider the positive, hope-filled tone of the Scriptures for today. Though the first reading from Isaiah’s Suffering Servant canticle is somber and ponderous, he also articulates a reason for hope. Right from the very beginning, the Lord speaks about His servant with pride and joy, promising eventual victory: *“See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted...”* And at the end of the passage, again we hear the voice of the Lord: *“I will give him his portion among the great... because he surrendered himself to death... and he shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses.”*

In the responsorial Psalm, which we sang a few minutes ago, Psalm 31, the servant cries out with his absolute trust in the Heavenly Father: *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* And the author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that since we have such a sympathetic and compassionate High Priest who suffered

like us and for us, we can confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find help in time of need.

In St. John's Passion account which we just heard, the last words of Christ on the cross are a proclamation of hope, a declaration of victory: "*It is finished.*" These words can be understood in many different ways and have a rich application to our theme of hopefulness. As we recall from last night's Gospel, a passage from John 13, Jesus "*loved His own in the world and loved them to the end.*" Throughout His life, Jesus had offered continuous worship to His Father and now His sacrifice of love for the Father and all of us was to be complete. The phrase, "*it is finished,*" brings to mind sacrificial imagery. In the Jewish tradition, a holocaust had to be completely burnt to be a total offering to God.

Also, according to Jewish custom, as the high priests killed the last lamb in the Temple on Preparation Day for the Passover, he uttered the Hebrew word *kalah*, which translates "*it is finished.*" In other words, at the very same time that Jesus was uttering this word from the cross, the high priests were finishing their ritual tasks of preparing for the Passover. Christ's life of loving worship of the Father was now perfectly complete. The sacrifice had been offered and accepted; now a new and deeper communion flows from this one, perfect atonement offering. Herein rests the origin of Christian hope, the dawning of resurrection.

To speak of something being finished also means – in the Greek sense of the word – that it is perfected – something or someone has completed its purpose. In Christ’s case, it is clear enough that perfection had to do with love: *“He loved his own to the end...”* Our role is to do our best to accept God's love. Contemplating God's perfect love on the cross, we find reason for hope. We deepen our confidence that we are capable of loving, of suffering with and for the other. As St. Augustine once said, *“You have begun to love? Then God has begun to dwell in you.”*

Christ’s work is finished in the sense that He has fulfilled His mission; He has become the perfect offering on behalf of our sins. He has given us a reason for hope. But now, our work begins. He has finished the foundation, but we must continue the building. The mystery of Christ’s suffering continues to unfold in us, through us, and among us, to the extent that we accept His love and put it into action in a life of faith, hope, and charity.

We will shortly be raising our supplications and intercessions to the Lord in union with the suffering Christ throughout the world. But even on this day, we do so with hope and confidence, for we know Christ’s victory is dawning already now on Good Friday. These days and hours – as always – somewhere throughout the world the Body of Christ is experiencing the challenge but also the hope of Christ’s

dying and rising: in a special way this year, we pray with and for our brothers and sisters suffering for their Christian faith in Iraq and Darfur, and in the Holy Land.

We will soon reverence the unveiled cross and kiss the wood of the cross as a sign of our sorrow and hope, and we will put our hope into action by a life of compassion, prayer, and service. May we always be found worthy to stand at the foot of the cross of Christ where the Church was born and Christian hope began to dawn.

“Ave Crux, Spes Unica!” Behold the Cross, our Only Hope! Amen.