

GOOD FRIDAY -- April 10, 2009  
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God died. There is no other way to say it: on this Good Friday, we remember again the solemn, awful reality--God died. No matter how many times we have experienced this day, no matter how familiar we think we are with the story, it still has the capacity to astonish us. The starkness of the death of Jesus--God the Son, true God from true God--is reflected, even if only faintly, in the starkness of this liturgy. We began by processing forward in silence--no singing, no music--just sorrowful, solemn silence. The deacon and the priest prostrate themselves on the floor in honor of the crucified Christ, the true and original high priest. We do not celebrate the Mass, the Eucharist today--the only day in the entire year that is the case. That's because the Eucharist re-presents sacramentally the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross; today, on the other hand, we commemorate that death with unique precision and solemnity.

God died. Two short, simple words--but linked together, what power they have--what an impact they make! We are all aware of the power of words: the good they can accomplish and the evil or hurt they can inflict. Think of a parent's words to their children or words exchanged between spouses. They can be words of encouragement and praise that can build the child up or strengthen the marriage. Or they can be words of harshness or ridicule that can leave a lifelong scar or destroy a marriage.

Or think of the words we read in Scripture. Think of the power and the healing impact of Jesus' words:

- "Blessed are the poor in spirit--theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
- "Nor do I condemn you. Go--and from now on, avoid this sin."
- "Lazarus, come out!"--come out of the grave that held your dead body and live once again!

And then consider the dark power, the lies and sin found in these words:

- from Peter: "I don't this man Jesus you are talking about!"
- Judas' words to the high priest offering to betray Jesus for a few pieces of silver;
- the crowd's words demanding Jesus' death: "Crucify him! Crucify him!", words that ultimately convinced the cowardly Pilate to condemn Jesus to death.

Words do indeed have power--the power to build and to do good, but also the power to tear down and do evil. I dare say we all have had personal experience of that double-edged power, both in the giving and in the receiving. Even greater, however, is the power of the Word--singular, and with a capital 'W'. What do I mean by that? It goes back to the gospel of John, whose account of the Passion we read today and every Good Friday. In the first chapter of John's gospel, we read some very important words about the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelled among us." That Word, that single Word that was God and became flesh is one man and one man only: Jesus the Christ. Of no one else has it been said--of no one else could it be said--that someone was or is this God who became one of us in our human nature: not Moses or Abraham, not Buddha or Confucius, not Mohammed or anyone else.

And in John's account of the Passion, we hear Jesus--that divine Word become flesh--speak other words of revelation and power, especially his words from the Cross:

- "Woman, behold your son....behold your mother." In the midst of his agony on the Cross, Jesus is concerned for and sees to the care of his Mother. How beautiful the words of Jesus' filial love!

--"I thirst." During the past week or so, we have reflected on Jesus' great thirst and passionate love for each and every one of us. In the midst of his agony on the Cross, Jesus expresses his fervent wish for us to desire and turn to him. How beautiful the words of Jesus' consuming love!

--"It is finished." His earthly life drawing to a close and in the midst of his continuing agony on the Cross, Jesus expresses the fact that the work of our redemption is completed, finished and fulfilled. How beautiful the words of Jesus' redemptive love!

And after these words, Jesus bowed his head and handed over his spirit. Jesus, the Word who was God, the Word that became flesh, died. God died. Can you comprehend and embrace the awful power and reality of those two words together? Can you comprehend and embrace the power and reality of the Word--Jesus the Christ, Jesus who is God the Son--who embraced agonizing death freely and willingly in order to win for us the opportunity for eternal life and joy? Can you comprehend and embrace the power of Jesus' words calling us to repent, to change, to love, to forgive in imitation of him? My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, never cease to embrace the power of the word of God--the words of Jesus and Jesus who is the Word. And never forget the infinite power that comes from the reality of that desolate Friday afternoon nearly 2000 years ago, the day of which it is truly said: God died.