

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

As Jesus had often gathered his disciples together to pray in the garden, so we are together right now as we enter into this passion. And, we all have a passion in our own lives. We all have a cross in our own lives. We don't have to go out and seek a cross, it's given to us. I want you to think about that right now. What is the cross that you've been asked to carry in your own life?

Now, our natural or our human nature has a tendency to want to fight or flee. That's our natural response when we encounter suffering – to either enter into a fight with it or to flee from it. That's our natural response, but Jesus shows us a supernatural response. Jesus shows us that when we encounter suffering, when we experience the cross, we don't need to fight. We don't need to flee. We simply need to stand.

And so, I was praying with this idea. As I went through the passion myself, I realized there is a lot of movement, a lot of motion. I was just going through some of that litany of movement and motion. It helped me to see that, during it all, the one that stands the entire time neither fighting nor fleeing is Jesus. He calls us to do the same with our own cross... not to fight it or to flee from it – but to stand.

So, we begin in the garden. Jesus is there with his disciples, and Judas had already begun to fight. So, Judas gathered the band of soldiers together, and they came with torches and weapons and lanterns. They were there coming for a fight. Jesus knew that everything was going to happen, but He simply stood there. When He was accused, he simply said, "I AM." Then there was a moment of flight when everybody collapsed and fell to the ground. And, Jesus said, "You've come for Me, so let My disciples go." The disciples began to follow Him for just a little bit until they got to the Praetorium. When they arrived at the Praetorium, none of the disciples entered in with Him.

Peter stayed outside. Peter would begin his flight. It was also Peter that would fight in the garden. When they first came to capture Jesus, Peter's natural instinct was to fight.

He took out his sword, and he cut one of the guard's ears off. Jesus corrected Peter. Jesus healed the ear, and He told Peter to simply just stand. When Jesus was taken to the Praetorium, He would stand there instead of fighting or fleeing. He simply stood. As the high priest continued to question Jesus, Jesus would not try to defend Himself. He didn't get into an argument. He simply stood and accepted. Peter would deny. The cock would crow, and Jesus would continue standing as he was taken into the Praetorium.

He was taken before Caiaphas the high priest. Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world." And, He said to Pilate, "Anyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Jesus stood as He was handed over to be scourged. He didn't fight it. He didn't run from it. He stood while, wrapped in a cloth of purple, they spit on Him and yelled, "Hail, king of the Jews." Jesus stood.

Pilate again questioned him and said, "Behold the man." Jesus stood, and they began to shout, "Crucify him. Crucify him." Jesus didn't panic. He didn't run. He didn't fight. He simply stood. So, Pilate said to him, "Why do you not speak to me?" And, Jesus said nothing. Jesus knew that Pilate had no power over Him. Jesus said, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above." Everything is continuing to spiral as the Crucifixion is coming closer and closer. Jesus doesn't defend himself. He doesn't flee. He simply stands.

Pilate says, "Behold your king," and the people cry out, "Crucify him. Crucify him." Jesus doesn't argue. He doesn't fight. He doesn't flee. He stands.

He's taken to Golgotha – the translation meaning "Place of the Skull," and he is crucified.

Interestingly, almost everyone has fled at this point. Standing by the cross now are only His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. These are the only ones that didn't fight or flee. They were standing there with Him by the cross. We are given that beautiful line where Jesus says to His beloved, "Behold your mother," and to His mother, "Woman, behold your son." They don't fight, and they don't flee. They simply stand there.

And finally, when it is finished, Jesus says His final words, which are not words of fighting or fleeing but simply humble acceptance. He says, "It is finished." He bows His head and breaths His last.

Jesus shows us all the way to embrace the Cross. When we experience any suffering in our life, our natural tendency is to fight it or to flee from it. He shows us how to simply and humbly stand with it and accept it.

So, I want us to think about our crosses. As we come to the end of these 40 days of praying, fasting, and almsgiving, maybe this Lent hasn't turned out the way that we wanted it to. Maybe we haven't done our praying, fasting, and almsgiving or become the saint that we wanted to.

Right now Jesus invites us simply to stand – no longer to fight, no longer to flee -- but to stand.

Maybe your cross for you is your marriage, and He's calling you right now not to fight anymore, not to flee from it, but to simply stand. Maybe your cross is conflict with your children or with your parents, with your brother or sister, and He's calling you right now not to fight it, not to flee from it but to stand.

Maybe your conflict is at work with your boss or your employees, and right now He's telling you not to fight it or to flee from it but to stand. Maybe God right now is asking you to give up something in your life or to let go of something – to stop fighting, to stop fleeing and to stand and accept.

Maybe there's some suffering in your life – some illness, be it spiritual or physical or emotional. Perhaps we have been fighting or running from something all of our lives – and right now, Jesus is just telling you to stand and accept it.

Judas fled, Peter fought, Jesus and the women simply stood.

This Good Friday, whatever is going on in your life, whatever your cross is, whatever your suffering is – know that we're not called to fight it, or to flee it – but simply to stand with it. And to realize that HE is standing right next to us, taking it from us, and laying upon it once more. AMEN!