

Good Friday

March 30, 2018

“I am thirsty.” These are among the last words spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ. After hanging on the cross for hours in the blazing sun, with blood flowing from his wounds, it is understandable that Jesus would be thirsty. But these words of Jesus have another more profound meaning. It is not only the physical thirst of the moment, but his life-long thirst to quench the thirst of every human heart for life. Jesus’ great thirst is to impart life to us. Just as he had quenched the thirst of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus wants to quench our thirst for life.

So often in our thirst for life, we pursue what we imagine will bring us happiness. Very often we make poor choices, even choosing what in the end brings sadness, not joy. Such poor choices are very often sinful. G.K. Chesterton said “Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.” Even when we sin we are thirsting for love and for life, but we are looking in the wrong places.

We relish our human freedom. But poor choices do not enhance our freedom. They diminish it. When we sin we become ever weaker, and collapse again and again into sin. It is said that the punishment of sin is sin. Who then shall rescue us? God alone! St. John tells us that in his great mercy God sent his son into the world, not to condemn it but so that through him the world might be saved.

The very one whom God had sent to save us from condemnation was himself condemned, nailed to a cross and put to death. In the eyes of the world of unbelievers it was just another execution. But Jesus, who already saw the cross looming on the horizon, would not regard it as an execution at all. Jesus would make his cross a willing sacrifice, an oblation of love, a gift of himself to the Father and to the world. How very different perceptions can be! Though innocent himself, Jesus freely embraced the death of a sinner, so we who are sinners might not die, but live forever.

Contemplating the cross of Jesus after his conversion, the Apostle Paul wrote in his Letter to the Galatians, “He [Jesus] gave himself for me, because he loved me. Paul took it all so very personally, as we all should.

Right from the beginning, the divine purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world was to make manifest the love of God through Divine mercy. In the opening chapter of the Gospel of John, we hear how John the Baptist had directed the attention of his disciples to Jesus, declaring to them, “There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” [Jn. 1, 29].

God's love is best shown by his great mercy. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus asks of us to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. What does that mean: Be perfect? Only God is perfect. Human beings are marked by all kinds of imperfections. "We all go astray" [Ps. 52]. It is interesting to note that in the parallel passage in Luke, Jesus expresses it differently. He asks us to be merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful. So there we have it, it is mercy that makes perfect the love of God.

It is the mercy of God that today's liturgy invites us to experience. Jesus instructed his disciples, saying to them, "Those whose sins you forgive are forgiven." They are sent forth as ministers to deliver the mercy of God. The divinely instituted Sacrament of Reconciliation is an extraordinary gift. It gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven. They are blotted out. The record is expunged forever. Taken away by the One who takes away the sins of the world!

But there is more. God's forgiveness is not merely a forensic gesture, a pardoning. It is not merely a scrubbing of the record of our sin. It is much more than this. The psalmist declares: the Lord restores my soul [ps. 23, 3]. The grace of God brings about within us an interior renewal. God not only forgives, God sanctifies us; God transforms us from within. God enables us to live a new life. This is all the work of the Holy Spirit!

In today's Gospel, just after Jesus said, "I am thirsty," he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. These words have a very deep meaning. Jesus did not just die. He gave up the Spirit. He released the gift of the Holy Spirit into the world. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus had said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly." Jesus released the gift of the Holy Spirit to quench the thirst of all who long for life.

As we contemplate the cross of Christ, it begins to dawn on us ever more fully that we are loved by a Love that is beyond all comprehension. Let no one here today think that he or she is so far beyond the reach of divine mercy that there is for you no hope of redemption. God is love. God is merciful. And Jesus is thirsty to impart to each and every one of us that life for which Jesus died upon a cross that we might have life.

Today we are called, not only to receive God's mercy, but also to become agents of mercy in imitation of Christ who said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall have mercy shown them." When we have tasted the joy of God's mercy, we too, like Jesus, become thirsty for the salvation of others and manifest it by being compassionate and merciful toward them.

There is much anger, hatred and violence today, expressed not only in violent acts, but in words too. The polarization is most profound. It is a toxic world in many ways, but there are and can be places and moments of healing and transformation, such as when we listen deeply and come to a new appreciation of someone who has a different viewpoint, or when we forgive someone and offer an olive branch of peace or when we show some kindness and

consideration to someone who is poor or when we hand over to the One who takes away the sins of world all our hurts and resentments and wrong doings and just allow God to love us and heal our memories, and make us new again.

As always, it is a delight for God to receive us. He turns no one away. So, dear friends, why are you here? What are you thirsting for on this Good Friday?

Father Neil