

Homily Good Friday April 2018

Garrison Keillor in one of his unique radio broadcasts told about a Thanksgiving he experienced in rural Minnesota. It sounded very similar to Southern Thanksgivings. The whole family gathered around this huge table, creaking under the weight of a turkey-centered feast. "Then", said Keillor, "someone made the mistake of calling on Uncle John to say the blessing. They should have known that Uncle John couldn't pray without talking about the cross and crying. Nothing makes the rest of us more uncomfortable than standing around listening to a grown man cry. We stared at the floor and shifted from one foot to another." Then Garrison Keillor added this incisive observation that cuts to the quick: "All of us knew that Jesus had died on the Cross, but Uncle John had never gotten over it."

That little story from Garrison Keillor about Uncle John is meant to make us smile. I am not sure any one of us should ever "get over" the Cross.

The Crucifixion teaches us many things but today I would like to mention four.

Someone once said that the Cross is the Greatest Valentine in History. **First, The Cross teaches us that God's love is real.**

It describes the purest expression of love the world has ever known. Some one willingly died so that others could live. That is Jesus.

Saying "I love you" only goes so far with human beings because generally we need more than words we have got to see proof. Everyone says "I will love you" when they get married, but, the proof is in their day to day life. God knew we needed more than words we actually needed to see his love for us. We see that love in the gift of Christ's life for us in the Cross.

The bible says: "In this is love not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his Son to be the expiation for our sins." (I John 4:10)

Mrs. Rouse tells the story of a girl she grew up with as a child in Cozad, Nebraska, named Alice. She said Alice's mom and grandmother were both alcoholics and prostitutes. This made both miserable guardians to Alice and her brothers and sisters.

One night Alice's mother and grandmother, both drunk, stalled the car on railroad tracks with the whole family onboard. Alice could hear the freight train whistle blow off in a distance and she knew the danger they were in. She struggled to get her brothers and sisters out of the car and dragged both her mother and grandmother out of the car to safety.

As she was pulling the last one away from the car the train hit the car at 60 mph. Alice's extravagant love saved her family's life, but it cost her for as the train smashed into the car Alice herself was too close and it smashed against her. She died. Her whole family lived. Christ experienced the full weight of sin as it smashed into Him at Calvary, we stood at a safe distance and watched. Genuine extravagant love.

I think we needed to see the innocent Christ die in order to see with our own eyes God's love revealed in a flesh and blood life.

The purpose of revelation is to teach about the nature of our relationship with God.

The second important thing the Cross teaches us is the reality of sin.

Jesus was only 33 when he died upon Calvary. Falsely accused, bitterly reviled and yet guilty of no wrong. A healer and helper, a lover of little children, a liberator of people imprisoned by their own guilt, a man who knew God intimately enough to address him as "Abba," Daddy, and yet never lost his concern for the least and the lowest. Yet there he hangs on the cross of Calvary. He got there because people were jealous, rigid, greedy, spiteful and cruel.

He got there because people eagerly lied about his intentions and swore false testimony against him. He got there because there is evil in the world and sometimes the innocent suffer unjustly. People don't believe in sin anymore and yet there is Christ on the Cross and He is still there in the world's innocent who still suffer.

Sin is deadly. It can kill bodies, it can kill marriages, it can kill a church, it can kill a soul. An unknown author put it like this: "Sin steals joy. Sin removed confidence. Sin brings guilt . . . Sin quenches God's Spirit. Sin brings physical damage. . . Sin causes an ache in the soul. Sin breaks God's heart. Sin opens the door to other sins. Sin produces fear. Sin makes me it's slave. Sin took God's only Son and crushed his body.

The Cross teaches us that Sin is real.

The third thing the Cross teaches us is what it means to be a Christian. There is no Christianity without the Cross..

In verse 23 of our text, Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Jesus said that if we wanted to follow Him, we must take up our cross daily! This does not mean to simply endure whatever is thrust upon us by what some people call fate or bad luck. A cross is an unforced, voluntary obligation. It means to offer some costly witness or ministry because our gratitude compels us.

It is from the Cross Christ forgives. Here he is mocked, tortured, spit on and he prays "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Christ's response to hatred it to have pity on those who are filled with hate and to forgive. Herein he teaches us what it means to be a real Christian. Christ could have prayed this prayer for their forgiveness in silence, but he chose to pray it aloud. He wanted us to "overhear" this prayer. He not only wanted us to now we're forgiven; he wanted to teach us what it means to be his follower.

The cross teaches us what it means to be a Christian.

The fourth thing that the cross teaches us is hope.

A criminal is being justly punished and hung beside Jesus on Mt. Golgotha. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). What a comfort. The criminal confessed his unworthiness and just like that through the power of the Cross he is forgiven. You and I can gain Christ’s forgiveness just as easily. All we need do is ask for it! Do we have to do something to gain this forgiveness? Christ did it all on Good Friday. The cross teaches us about hope. We can be absolved from sin and given salvation by just asking for it.

Let me summarize what I have tried to say today.

Someone once said that the Cross is the Greatest Valentine in History. **First, Cross teaches us that God’s love is real.**

Second, The Cross teaches us about the reality of sin. Evil is real.

The third thing the Cross teaches us is what it means to be a Christian. There is no Christianity without the Cross..

And lastly, The cross teaches us about hope because if the man crucified with Christ on Good Friday could gain forgiveness and paradise by just asking for it so too can we. Just ask.