

Behold the Wood of the Cross

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

1. The Silence of God and the Loudness of Love

Good Friday is the only day of the liturgical year when **no Mass is celebrated**. The Church is bare. The tabernacle is empty. The altar is stripped. This silence is not abandonment; it is **God's loudest cry of love**—spoken through a crucified body.

The world asks, “Where is your God?” On Good Friday, we point not to arguments, but to the Cross and say with St. Paul:

“We preach Christ crucified... the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24).

In a culture where love is often mistaken for sentiment or self-indulgence, **Good Friday declares:**

Real love bleeds. Real love forgives. Real love sacrifices.

2. The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52–53): Prophecy Fulfilled

The first reading, Isaiah 52:13–53:12, is often called the **Fourth Servant Song**. Written over **500 years before Christ**, it contains uncanny detail:

- “He was despised and rejected” (Isaiah 53:3)
- “By His wounds we are healed” (v. 5)
- “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter” (v. 7)

This passage is so messianic that **even Jewish scholars** have wrestled with its implications.

St. Justin Martyr, debating with Trypho the Jew in the 2nd century, pointed to this prophecy:

“These words, brethren, refer to Christ... and no one else has been crucified who could be said to fulfill them” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 13).

This text, read in light of **John's Passion narrative**, affirms the Church's proclamation:

Jesus is the Suffering Servant who bore our iniquities and was crushed for our sins.

3. Psalm 31: Into Your Hands

Psalm 31 is not a lament of defeat, but a **confession of trust in the midst of darkness**.

“Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.” (Psalm 31:6)

These are the final words of Jesus on the Cross (Luke 23:46), and the daily prayer of countless martyrs.

In this psalm, the Church learns how to die: **not with bitterness or blame, but with surrender.**

St. Ambrose once said:

“Christ did not seek escape from death but embraced it, that He might teach us how to face our own.” (*On the Christian Faith*, Bk. V)

4. The Letter to the Hebrews: The Perfect High Priest

Hebrews 4:14–16 and 5:7–9 declares Jesus as both **priest and victim**, “tempted in every way, yet without sin.”

No pagan religion had a god who suffered. But Christianity dares to say:

- God wept.
- God sweat blood.
- God cried out, “Why have you forsaken me?”

St. John Chrysostom preaches:

“He took upon Himself not just our nature, but our anguish, our dread, our agony—that He might be a priest who truly knows our pain.”

This is why we do not merely admire Jesus. We **cling to Him** in our trials, because He **walked through the valley of death before us.**

5. The Passion According to John: The Victory of the Cross

John’s Gospel shows us that the Passion is not a tragedy—it is a **triumph.**

- Jesus is not a helpless victim. He “**knows all that is to happen**” (John 18:4).
- He declares, “**I am**” in the garden, and soldiers fall back—divine majesty revealed.
- He carries His cross willingly.
- From the cross, He gives Mary to John, and with it, **gives the Church her Mother.**
- At last, He says not “I am finished,” but “**It is finished**” (John 19:30): the **mission is complete.**

Origen taught that John emphasizes Jesus’ **divine control** to show that the Passion is not imposed but **offered in love:**

“He gave Himself willingly. He handed over His Spirit freely.”

6. The Veneration of the Cross: Why Do We Kneel?

On Good Friday, we **kneel before the Cross**, not as a relic of torture, but as the **throne of mercy**.

Why do Catholics venerate a crucifix?

- Because the Cross is where the price of our sin was paid (1 Peter 2:24).
- Because it reminds us that no suffering is meaningless if united to Christ's.
- Because, as **St. Paul** said: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

The **Crucifix** is not a contradiction to resurrection—it is its **path**.

There is **no Easter Sunday without Good Friday**.

7. Relevance in a Time of Crisis: Finding Hope in the Wounded Christ

Today's world is pierced with:

- **War and hatred**, yet Christ says, "Peace I leave with you."
- **Betrayals and abuse**, yet He still loves Judas till the end.
- **Loneliness and abandonment**, yet He makes even the Cross a place of communion: Mary and John receive one another.

To the addict, the abused, the terminally ill, the poor, the betrayed—**Good Friday says: He understands**. He walks with you. He has gone before you. And He redeems **not by removing suffering**, but by **filling it with meaning**.

As **Pope St. John Paul II** wrote:

"The cross stands as a mystery, but not a scandal. It is the 'yes' of God to the suffering of humanity."

8. "Behold Your King" – Now and Forever

Pontius Pilate declared, "Behold your King!" (John 19:14)
He meant it sarcastically. The Church repeats it **reverently**.

On Good Friday, we behold not a defeat, but a victory. Not a corpse, but the King who reigns from the Cross.

Let us draw near to the Crucified with faith and gratitude.

For as **St. Catherine of Siena** said:

"It is not nails that held Him to the Cross, but love."