

GOOD FRIDAY

Is 52:13-53:12; Ps 31:2,6,12-13,15-16,17,25; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; Jn18:1-19:42

SACRAMENTS FROM THE CROSS

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Friday, April 19, 2019, 7:00 p.m.

Red is the color of this day.

Red is a strong color, a passionate color.

When we are at prayer during liturgy,
red is worn on three different kinds of occasions.

Tonight, for the Passion we just heard,
it is easy to make the red connection.

Jesus shed his blood on the Cross.

Blood is red.

Red represents Jesus' suffering,
particularly the blood that came out of the wounds in his hands and his feet,
the blood that flowed from his pierced side,
the blood around his head from his crown of thorns,
and the blood from wounds all over his body from his scourging,
and from when he was stripped of his garments.

A second occasion when red is worn is when we remember a martyr.

A martyr is someone who died for the faith,
whose blood was spilled for the faith.

Recall, if you will,
the third occasion when red is worn at liturgy.

It is one of our most important feasts.

It is not Christmas.

It is not Easter.

It is ... Pentecost.

Red is the color for the Holy Spirit

because fire is red,

and tongues as of fire appeared over the heads of the apostles
on the first Pentecost (see Acts 2:3).

So I have a question for our reflection this evening.

As we think red:

Is there a connection between the Passion and the Holy Spirit?

Are there two red aspects to the death of Jesus?

Let's go back to yesterday and the Last Supper.

Jesus was at the head of the table,
and his disciples were gathered around him.
In the Gospel of John, Jesus knows that the Cross is coming,
and that the next day would be his last day.
Jesus was fully aware that he had come from God (i.e., heaven)
and that he was returning to God (i.e., going back to heaven)
(Jn 13:3b; see also 7:33b; 16:5b,10,28).
We heard this comment at the beginning of the footwashing.
So after Judas Iscariot departed and went off into the darkness (Jn 13:30),
Jesus told the Eleven, with great kindness and concern, very affectionately,
“My children, I will be with you only a little while longer” (Jn 13:33a).

Jesus knew that his absence would be hard on them,
so he told them, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn14:18).
So the question then is, “How would Jesus come to the disciples?”
“How would Jesus be present to them?”
Later in the conversation Jesus answers this question:
“I will send you the Advocate, the Holy Spirit” (paraphrase, Jn 16:7b).
Jesus wanted to reassure his disciples,
“Because I love you, I will be with you always,
and I will give everything that you need” (implied).

Now we fast-forward to Good Friday afternoon.
Jesus has been hanging in crucifixion for three hours,
and the end is at hand.
Jesus was looking down on his mother Mary and the Beloved Disciple,
and he was mindful of his double promise:
“I will not leave you orphaned,”
and, “I will send the Holy Spirit.”

In the final moment Jesus said, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30).
Then he bowed his head.
And the very last thing that Jesus did is that
“he handed over the spirit” (Jn 19:30).

The spirit.
What spirit?
The Holy Spirit.
Who did Jesus hand the Holy Spirit to?
Mary and the Beloved Disciple
who were standing at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27).
Who do Mary and the Beloved Disciple represent?
They represent everyone, you and me included.
Which means that Jesus, as he died,
left this amazing gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit,
his abiding presence, to be with us always.

Jesus meant it when he said, “I will not leave you orphans.”
As Jesus died he bequeathed the gift of the Spirit.
It was a “Pentecost”: Passion and the Holy Spirit, red and red.
Jesus loves us so much that he would never allow a gap in his presence.
If he was not going to be with us physically,
 he made sure that he would be with us spiritually.
His presence would be continuous and uninterrupted.
Jesus would never, ever be absent.
Jesus would never, ever leave us orphans.

At the final moment of his life,
 Jesus emptied himself for our benefit (see Phil 2:7).

And Jesus did not only give us the gift of the Holy Spirit.
After Jesus imparted the gift of the Spirit,
 a soldier pierced his side with a lance,
 and blood and water flowed out (Jn 19:34).

This is all about the love of Jesus Christ.
Jesus did not hold anything back at all:
 every breath – given for us;
 every last dribble of water – given for us;
 every last droplet of blood – given for us.
Jesus was totally spent.
There was nothing left.
Jesus poured out everything he had – for us.

There is no greater love than this,
 to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (paraphrase, Jn 15:13).

This is the Jesus promise at the Last Supper:
 “Because I love you, I will be with you always,
 and I will give everything that you need’ (implied).

From his wounded side he gave us water,
 living water (see Jn 4:10), baptism, a fountain of grace (see Jn 4:14).
From his wounded side he gave us his Blood,
 the Precious Blood, the Eucharist, his real presence, his nourishment (see Jn 6:55,57);
 and the Blood that washes away our sins (see 1 Jn 1:7; Rv 1:5b), Reconciliation,
 absolution, a bond of friendship that he extends to us always (see Jn 15:14a,15b).

In his final moments on the Cross,
 Jesus gave us everything that we would ever need,
 whether it was while he was in the tomb,
 or later, after he had returned to heaven.

He gave us the Sacraments of Initiation the Cross:
Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation:
his water, his blood, and his breath.

Jesus wanted to make sure that we would have everything that we would ever need,
and he gave it all from the Cross,
his very life, a total self-gift,
given unreservedly, without holding anything back.

Maybe there are times that you, or me,
feel that Jesus is absent, nowhere to be found.
Maybe we feel like we are orphaned, all alone, all by ourselves.
We wonder,
Does Jesus love me?
Does Jesus care about me?
Is Jesus here with me?

If an occasion like this should ever happen,
there is a very good thing that a person can do.
Go off alone, all by yourself.
Go to a room or a place where there is a crucifix.
Get positioned on a chair or a couch that is opposite the crucifix
where it is possible to have clear, unobstructed view.
Then, in silence, fix your gaze on Jesus and his Cross,
and meditate on Jesus crucified.

Remember his reassuring words, "I will not leave your orphans."
Remember his promise, "I will send you the Holy Spirit."

Remember the water,
and the gift of the graces of Baptism.
Remember the blood,
and the gift of his real presence and his real mercy.
Remember his final action,
how he handed over the gift of the Spirit.

We are not orphans.

When we gaze upon the crucifix,
we have the reassurance that Jesus is with us always
and that he gives us everything we need.