

GOOD FRIDAY

Is 52:13-53:12; Ps 31:2,6,12-13,15-16,17,25; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; Jn 18:1-19:42

IMMEDIATELY BLOOD AND WATER FLOWED OUT

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Friday, March 30, 2018, 7:00 p.m.

I have the **name** of a **saint** that is **not** very **well known**.
Maybe you have heard about him. Maybe, probably not.
His name is **St. Longinus**.
For most of my life, I had never heard of St. Longinus.

I made my **first trip** to **Rome** when I was a theology student.
If a Catholic goes to Rome,
a visit to **St. Peter's Vatican Basilica** is a must.
I entered the basilica and went to the **high altar**.
It is **under** a beautiful canopy, the **baldachino**.
It is where the Pope says Mass, like tomorrow for the Easter Vigil.
It is **above** the **tomb** of **St. Peter** the apostle which is on the lower level.
There are **four huge statues** around the altar.
Of course, I went to **take a picture** of each of them.
Two of them are **women**: St. **Helena** and St. **Veronica**.
The other **two** are **men**: St. **Andrew** and St. **Longinus**.
St. Longinus!

Who is he?

Why is this guy that I have never heard of
get such a prominent place in the most important church of our faith?

It was time to look for clues.

Why these saints?

St. Helena found the True **Cross**.

St. **Veronica** wiped the face of Jesus when he was on the Way of the **Cross**.

St. **Andrew** died on an X-shaped **Cross**.

Ah, a light when on, St. **Longinus** has to have **something** to do **with the Cross**.

Then I looked at **statue**.

St. **Longinus** is holding a **lance** in his right hand.

It is a **long pole** with a **sharp blade** on the end.

Ah, another light went on.

St. **Longinus** must be the **soldier** who stood at the **foot of the Cross**,

the one who "**thrust his lance** into [Jesus'] side,
and immediately blood and water came out" (Jn 19:34).

Longinus was a **centurion**,
a high-ranking **Roman military officer**,
a **non-believer** who worshiped the **pagan Roman gods**.

Longinus was, indeed, **at the foot of the Cross**.
He was there **following** the **orders of Pontius Pilate** (Jn 19:31).
Longinus and the other soldiers **broke** the **legs** of the **two criminals** (Jn 19:32),
but when he came to Jesus, he did not break his legs (Jn 19:33).
It looked to Longinus like **Jesus was dead already**,
but he had to be **certain**.
Remember, Longinus was a centurion, a **senior officer**,
not a young man anymore,
and his **eyesight** was **not as good** as it used to be.
But his eyesight was **still good enough** to **aim** his **lance** right at **heart of Jesus**.
Longinus pierced Jesus' side.
The gospel tells us,
"immediately blood and water flowed out" (Jn 19:34).
What the **gospel does not tell** us
is that **some of the blood ran down** his lance and **touched his eyes**
and immediately **Longinus was cured**.
With his **vision** completely **restored**,
able to plainly see "him whom they have pierced" (see Jn 19:37; Is 53:5a; Zec 12:10),
he could see the **darkening** of the **sun**,
and he could see the **earth quaking**,
and from that very moment **Longinus became a disciple of Jesus**
(Thurston, H. J., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Vol. 1, 594-595).

St. John is the only evangelist to include this detail.
Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't say a word about the piercing of Jesus' side.
To John, this **detail** is **extremely important**,
and it should be important to you and me.

The **Longinus event** is very **telling about Jesus**.
It says how much Jesus loves us.
Jesus **gave everything** he had for us,
both when he was **alive**,
and even in the **moment of his death**.
Jesus **emptied himself** (Phil 2:7),
right down to his very **last drops of blood and water**.
After the blood and water had flowed out of him,
there was **nothing left**.
Jesus **gave unreservedly**.
Jesus **held nothing back**.
Jesus **gave his all**.
When Longinus witnessed Jesus' **complete gift of self**,
love of that magnitude,
it is no wonder that he **converted right then and there**.

Jesus was about to **depart**, to **ascend** to heaven.
As we **heard last night** at the Last Supper,
“Jesus knew that his **hour** had come to **pass from this world to the Father**” (Jn 13:1).
Jesus knew that he was **headed back to heaven**.
And from the Cross, **Jesus** was very **concerned** about his **disciples**,
and **every generation to come after** them,
and he wanted to be sure that they would **have everything** they would need **to carry on**.
It was time for him to leave his **parting spiritual gifts**,
and they would **flow out of him**.

Except, when a person is **dead**, **nothing** is **circulating** anymore.
There is **no blood pressure**.
If there is an **incision**, there might be a little **bit of drainage**.
With **Jesus hanging** on the Cross and the force of **gravity**,
there might have been **a few drips**,
but John says, “**blood and water** – please pay attention to this verb – **flowed out**” (Jn 19:34b).

It was **not drippage**.
It was **flowage**.
Something extraordinary, **miraculous**, is **happening** here.

Longinus did not realize it,
but he played a very **important role** in this scene.
When Longinus thrust his lance into the side of Jesus,
a **stream of grace flowed** from the **opening in Jesus’ side**.

It was not just a few drops of water; it was **flow of water**.
Jesus is “**living water**” (Jn 4:10).
There is a river of living water welling up within him (Jn 7:38).
Jesus explained, “This [is] in **reference** to the [**Holy**] **Spirit**” (Jn 7:39).
The water that flowed from the side of Jesus
represents the gift of the Holy Spirit
(Brown, R. E., *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year*, 190).
to his **disciples**, and to **you** and **me**.
As Jesus died, he gave a **wonderful farewell gift**,
the **abiding presence** and **tremendous power** of the **Holy Spirit**.
You’ve got it.
I’ve got it.
Jesus gave it to us **from the Cross**.
Jesus wants us to have what we need to carry on day-by-day.
This is how much **Jesus loves us**.

Many **people**, when they **die**, have a **will**,
and they **pass on** their **money** and their **possessions**.
Jesus, when he died, **passed on** the **gift of the Holy Spirit**.
Money is **good**, but the **Holy Spirit** is **priceless**.

And, the **water** and **blood** that **flowed** from the side of Jesus,
represent the **grace** that is **poured out** on us in **two sacraments**:
Baptism and **Eucharist**.

The water that flowed from the side of Jesus
represents the **water** that flows over our heads in the Sacrament of Baptism,
which is the **beginning** of the **life of grace**.

The blood that flowed from the side of Jesus
represents his **Precious Blood** that we receive in Holy Communion
which **keeps us in his grace** and **sustains us in his grace**
(Brown, R. E., *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year*, 190).

When it comes to the **grace that Jesus gives**,

Jesus wants us to be **well-supplied**.

There is **no drainage, oozing, or dripping** when it comes to his gifts.

When it comes to the **grace** that he **pours out** on his,
it is a **constant flow**.

It **started** on the **Cross**, and **continues to this very day**.

Longinus opened the **hole** in the **side of Jesus**,
and the **hole** has **never closed**.

The **flow** has **never stopped**.

Here we are on **Good Friday**.

What is so good about it?

Jesus chose to **lay down his life** for us (Jn 10:15b17,18),
and there is **no greater love** than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends (Jn 15:13).

What is **good** is that **Jesus loves us**.

What is good is that **he gave everything** he had for us,
down to every last ounce of water and blood within him.

What is good is that in leaving for heaven,

he **left us** the **gift** of his **Holy Spirit**.

What is good is that in dying,

he **supplied** us with the **grace** that comes to us in **Baptism** and the **Eucharist**.

The blood and water that flowed from his side were **his farewell gift to us**.

Jesus wants us to have the **spiritual graces** we need **to carry on** day-by-day.

What is so **good** about **Good Friday**?

The **crucifixion** is the most **compelling statement** of all
that **Jesus loves** every single one of **us**.

St. Longinus witnessed this **love** firsthand at the **foot of the Cross**
and it **led instantly** to his **conversion**.

The **blood** and **water** that **flow** from the **side of Jesus** to you and me
is an **amazing grace**.

His **grace** has **brought us this far**, and his **grace will lead us home**.