

## What is good about Good Friday?

Today we celebrate the Good Friday of our Lord's Passion, when Jesus our Lord was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, handed over to be tortured, made to bear the heavy wooden cross, was crucified on the cross, and died. This is what we commemorate today, the day when our Lord Himself died for our sake.

We all have our traditions surrounding Easter weekend. In church the weekend usually starts with Good Friday, people would go to church to have the stations of the cross and the Good Friday service with the veneration of the cross, sermons on the ten words Jesus spoke on the cross and the reading of the passion.

This year everything is different. It will be remembered forever because it is day fifteen of the national lockdown. In this time, we are now living in the reality of the pandemic called covid-19.

Please read the set readings for Good Friday. I will concentrate on the first reading from Isaiah.

Of the four suffering servant accounts in the prophet Isaiah this is the fourth and last, the song of the suffering servant.

Isaiah draws us a picture of the suffering, humility and glory of the suffering servant. He describes the suffering servant, how the servant looks and how the servant carries the pain and burdens of all the world.

Jesus is the suffering servant.

In the suffering of Christ, we come to understand who God is and How God loves us to the point of offering his son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. This is what you were not told, but you will see, and what you have not heard, but will understand.

Jesus himself said: "God so loved the world that He gave His only son, not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved."

Jesus takes the sins of all of us on himself on the cross. He dies to save us.

As he is dragged through the streets of Jerusalem up the hill where he is crucified for all to see. He is the one who is disfigured, a man intimately familiar with sorrow. He is pierced through for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities.

Yet, for all its sorrow and pain, all its drama and tragedy, the story of the suffering servant brings about something special. It gives us reason to hope.

Through the wounds of the suffering servant we understand our own suffering, the suffering that is in the world and we remember that we are an Easter people. Through his wounds we are healed.

All this suffering and humiliation comes to an end, the man that Mary sees on Easter Sunday is renewed and restored, he walks through locked doors and makes breakfast on the beach.

There in lies the glory of the suffering servant in that our sins are nailed to the cross. The suffering ends on the cross. Jesus's bones are not broken, nor is his body burned like the other people who are crucified, he is buried in a tomb of honour.

Many of us look at this and ask what is good about Good Friday? This is the *via dolorosa*, the way of sorrow, on this day there was darkness over the whole land, the veil of the temple was torn in two.

Jesus Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice to save us.

As we are in lockdown and experiencing these days in isolation and social distancing, we see how easily darkness can overcome us, how easy it is to be filled with fear and despair. As we feel cabin fever setting in, we realise how things have changed, we cannot go on holiday, visit friends and family, go out for supper, gone are takeout Fridays. Where will all this lead, are they going to find a cure for the virus, when will things return to normal, what will normal be after this?

Good Friday is all about life from death, forgiveness of sin. Isaiah says, the suffering servant grew up like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. When the servant of God is lifted up on the cross, he will draw all of humanity to himself.

The suffering ends in light, the light of life and justification for many. The suffering ends with a portion among the great, a share in the spoils with the strong. For the suffering servant there is Glory at the end of all of this. For us too.

Because of our God's tender mercy, the dawn will break upon us from on high. For this is why Jesus came into the world. The suffering servant is the portrait of the love of God. God has always loved us and will always love us, for nothing can separate us of the Love God has for us.

We are invited to come to this day with our own humility in submission to the will of God, we are invited to carry some of the burden with Jesus and show the world what it means to love and to give of self in love. For no greater love has anyone than the person who is willing to lay down his life for others.

Where I come from, we have our own very peculiar Good Friday traditions. I trust that you have yours too. This year you can share them in your own home with those closest to you.

I hope that there will be hot cross buns and loads of chocolate and empty eggs for the children and adults too, that there be some of the traditional joy of Easter. But most of all I pray that your hearts will be renewed, and your spirit filled with hope.

I pray with you and your family today, that Jesus the suffering servant looks kindly on you and have mercy upon you, that Jesus will keep you and your family safe throughout this time.

As you celebrate the great mystery of God's love for you that you will be renewed in body and spirit. That you will feel the burden of fear and anxiety lifted from the earth. Together we pray for everyone infected and affected with the novel corona virus. We pray for those who are leading the charge against the virus, for those in the front lines, the health professionals and all those who are charged with giving leadership throughout this time of crisis. We pray for those less fortunate, those for whom it is practically impossible to isolate or sustain themselves throughout this time. That there be charity and mercy shown to those most vulnerable. We also pray for those who are experiencing the hell of domestic violence during this time, that there be answers to their prayers too.

We pray together as we commend our spirit into the hands of our God. That God will raise us up, will renew us and give us new ways in which to show our love and concern for one another.