

Good Friday
April 9, 2004 – Cathedral of St. Mary
Bishop Samuel J. Aquila

In the reading from the book of the prophet, Isaiah, we hear of the suffering servant. This passage was written some 700 years prior to Jesus. The servant is one who suffers for his people. It was unclear in the minds of the Jewish people who this suffering servant was. Most of them believed that it was the Messiah. It was only after the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ that they began to reflect upon, those who were believers in Jesus, that the suffering servant is the Son of God.

We hear within those suffering servant passages of the total and complete innocence of the servant. We also hear of the servant's tremendous suffering. "He was afflicted. He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins. He was a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity." We see within Jesus the suffering that He endured for all of us and that His suffering gives to us the gift of the forgiveness of our sins. That, too, is promised in this passage. "He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins... By his stripes we were healed." We see that that healing takes away the sins of many and wins pardon for their offenses.

For those who are believers there can be no doubt in our minds that the suffering servant passages of Isaiah are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, that He is the one who suffers for us so that we might have life. It is important for us to reflect upon that suffering for it is the suffering of one who is totally innocent, one who is totally obedient. We hear of that obedience in the passage from Hebrews in which we hear that He was obedient even unto death. It is Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, who is obedient unto death, who is the suffering servant.

There has been much discussion over the last few months with the movie, "The Passion of The Christ". One of the great questions that has surfaced concerns the violence within the movie, and whether Jesus Christ really suffered the way it is demonstrated in the film. There have been questions around the violence of crucifixion, with people asking, "Was it really that violent?" We have to remember that we, as a people, rarely see the torture of others, particularly here within the United States. We no longer have public executions. We no longer have public floggings. For those of us who have ever seen violence, we know how repulsed we are by it.

For the Jewish people and for the Gentiles, that type of violence was common. We know that from 150 B.C., before Christ, to 350 A.D. the Romans used crucifixion routinely. Because of the violence of crucifixion, as the historian Josephus commented, "it was the most wretched of all deaths." It was reserved only for the lower class citizens and for

those who had committed heinous crimes. We see within the crucifixion that most of those who were crucified usually were stripped naked. Some were nailed to a cross. Some were flogged before their crucifixion. The people would gather around the person who was crucified and cast stones and jeer at them. All of that is documented in history.

In the famous book, “A Doctor at Calvary”, the author speaks at length of what Jesus probably suffered in the crucifixion. The film, “The Passion of The Christ”, has renewed our interest in the crucifixion, causing us to reflect on the great pain that our God has suffered for us. There has also been renewed interest in the shroud of Turin. Whether or not one accepts the authenticity of the shroud, the shroud demonstrates clearly what a man experienced in crucifixion. The man whose body is reflected within the image on the shroud, shows that he was scourged front and back at least 120 times. It shows that the crown of thorns was not just a simple crown that went around the head, but one that was like a cap that was pushed and pressed into his skull. They know, too, that there is swelling around the face, that he definitely had a black eye, a broken nose, and abrasions on the knees. All of that is reflected in the image of the shroud.

For those of you who would like to reflect more upon the suffering of Christ, I encourage you, for those of you who have computers and who are able to access web pages, to go to Our Sunday Visitor and look at their “In Focus” page on the Crucifixion. It gives to us a reflection on the most recent historical studies on crucifixion and the suffering that Christ endured. The art that we oftentimes reflect upon, the image of the crucifix that we have here, and the image of the Stations of the Cross always present a very clean Crucifixion. But the Crucifixion was not clean. There was incredible suffering that occurred for you and me, for the sins that we have committed. All of that suffering was done for each one of us, for every human person, and for the sins of every human person. Every time you and I look upon the cross we should see how much our God has loved us, what He has done for us.

It was not just the Jews, it was not just the Romans who put Jesus on the cross. It was you and I and the sins that all of us have committed. All of us are guilty, but our God has loved us. He has given His life so our sins are forgiven. All we need to do is turn in repentance to our Lord, seek His forgiveness. All we have to do is utter, as the thief on the cross next to Jesus uttered, “Remember me in your kingdom.” That is how much our God loves us. We must have the confidence to bring our sin to Him, to repent of our sins, and know that He will forgive us.

Seven hundred years before His death and Resurrection, the prophet, Isaiah, imaged the suffering servant. “He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins... by his stripes we were healed... the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all... He shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses.”

On this Good Friday of 2004, let us remember as we venerate the cross today, the suffering our God endured for you and me that we might have the forgiveness of our sins, that we might have eternal life with Him.