

“...he was not indifferent, he does not turn away from our need”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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There's a lot of indifference in our world, indifference to suffering, indifference to abuse, indifference to poverty, indifference to hate. And, in general, we'd have to admit there is indifference to sin. Our world, our culture doesn't like the very concept of sin, and so it just ignores it. Or, in some of the more bizarre cases, our culture redefines sin and calls it good. But God is not indifferent to sin. He couldn't be, because sin is an offense against God. And just as importantly, sin takes us away from God. It separates us, alienates us, undermines our friendship with God. Left to itself, sin snuffs out the divine life within us, because sin cannot coexist with the life and holiness of God.

We might not want to face up to this, we might prefer to go along as if there were no problem. But God cannot remain indifferent; he loves us too much. All of salvation history is a story of God's redeeming love for his people, and it reaches its climax in the person of Jesus, his Son. He took on our human flesh so he could dwell among us, rather than remaining at a distance. He embraced us in our every need, even when we turned away. He even embraced death on Good Friday with all its suffering and sadness, because he wants us to experience true and lasting joy, the perfect joy of God himself.

My friends, this whole drama of Good Friday is proof of God's love, proof that he will literally do anything to rescue us from sin and death. So determined was Jesus to win us back that he was willing to go through the most brutal kind of execution. For our sakes, he endured it all, he accepted it all, he held nothing back. If we're not sure of God's love, we have only to look at what Jesus willingly accepted. The same Jesus who reached out and gently touched the poor and the leprous is beaten and scourged by his captors. The same Jesus who healed a paralytic and a man who is lame falls under the weight of the cross. The same Jesus who calmed a storm on the sea and walked on the waters allow his hands and feet to be nailed to the cross. The same Jesus who forgave the adulterous woman now forgives his persecutors: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." The same Jesus who raised Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus and the widow's son from the dead, now breathes his last and closes his eyes in death.

And he did it all for us. He could not be indifferent to our plight; he could not turn away from our need. He loves us too much, he thirsts for us. Mother Teresa, St. Teresa of Calcutta understood this well. She established chapels for her sisters and for the poor all over the world, and in all of them, underneath the crucifix, are those words that Jesus uttered from the cross: "I thirst." Perhaps he was physically thirsty, but even more so he was thirsty for love, he was thirsty for us. He longs for us as a lover longs for the beloved. He desires nothing more than our salvation, and he accepts his passion and death to make it happen. He goes to death, where we must all go, so that we might be with him in eternal life.

Some people are puzzled by Good Friday, by the crucifixion. They don't get it. Why did it happen? To use the words of Bishop Barron, "Is God a cruel taskmaster, demanding a bloody sacrifice so that his anger might be appeased? No, Jesus' crucifixion was the opening up of the divine heart so that we could see that no sin of ours could finally separate us from the love of God." Jesus wants to make it clear to all of us, sinners that we are, that nothing can stand in the way of God's love for us if we're willing to accept it. No sin of ours can overpower the love of Christ, even our indifference. Because he was not indifferent, he does not turn away from our need.

To his enemies this probably seemed to be the hour of their triumph and Christ's defeat. But in fact, this is the supreme hour of his triumph. Now when he seems to be more helpless than he has ever been before, he is in fact more powerful. When he seems to be more limited, more constrained, we discover that the power of his love is boundless, and his reach across the world to every heart in every age is infinite.

We might be uncomfortable with all this, we might prefer to remain undisturbed by the events of Good Friday. But we should be disturbed, and startled at the sight of Jesus, to use the words of Isaiah. There is no more room for indifference. Because we all know that there is no Easter without Good Friday, there is no resurrection without the crucifixion. As Pope Francis has said, "Anyone who turns away from the cross, turns away from the resurrection." The resurrection happened because Jesus was willing to hand over his life. He took up his risen life because he was first willing to lay it down for us, each one of us.

Although Good Friday was a sad and dark day for the disciples of Jesus, it is for us a good day. For we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. We are here not just to lament the death of Christ, even though we are in sorrow over our sins which led to his death. Rather we are here actually to rejoice in the victory that Jesus won by his death. God did not stand aloof. He loved us enough to do this for us, and how glad we are!