

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Last Sunday, it was the Passion of our Lord according to St. Mark. This evening, it's the Passion according to St. John, reading through the what of Good Friday — what happened to Him called Jesus.

We cringe as we hear of our Jesus being mocked and spat upon. We want to shut off our ears as we hear of His holy head crowned with thorns, His face struck, His back torn open by cruel whips. We agonize as we hear the unjust sentence pronounced upon Him: death. "*Why won't He defend Himself?*" We are appalled as WE join the mob in calling for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified.

We cry out in anguish as the nails are pounded through His innocent hands and feet, for what law had He broken? The witnesses were false; they lied, but even their lies did not condemn Him. We want to object when the soldiers have sport with Jesus, offering Him sour wine to drink, dividing His clothes among them, but we are too afraid. We shed a tear at the tender way Jesus commends His mother and beloved disciple to each other—He loved to the end.

We watch in horror and disbelief as very God, the only Son of the Father, breathes His last and dies. And then our sides ache as, adding insult to injury, they pierce His side with a spear. How is any of this good, O foolish Christians?

If all we ponder is the what of this day, then truly there is no reason to see it as Good Friday—rather Bad Friday or even Sad Friday. But we do not celebrate it that way, for it's not the what but the why that makes this day Good—not that there aren't still pangs of sorrow. For the why is for our sake, for our salvation, because of our sin.

Why the sorrows? Why the anguish? It's for our sins that He endures them. Why the wrath? Why the woe? We merit them; He inherits them. We're the wandering sheep—He the lamb led to the slaughter. We owe the debt—He pays it, His life the offering for our guilt.

Still we wonder why? What would move our God to pay such an enormous price? It is His love that moved the Father to send the sinless Son of God to die in sadness, that we, the sinful children of man, may live in gladness. Certainly there is nothing in us that would merit such love. We are corrupted to the core, by our nature children of wrath, destined for hell. But He came to give life, to give rebirth by His grace, to catch us in His net of love and pull us through water unto Himself, and set our course for heaven.

This is why this day is called Good — and there is still more, for He does not ask us to finish what He has begun. "*It is finished.*" We can never repay the debt

we owe. Still more, He doesn't even ask us to try; He says simply, "*Take up your cross and follow me.*" He says, "*hold fasts your confession and then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace where you'll receive mercy and find grace.*" He says, "*believe in me unto your own death and you will receive the crown of life.*"

Truly, if the annual focus of this special Friday of the year is only on the what of Jesus' passion and death, then this day and the succeeding two could fill you with despair and foreboding. But it's not just the what of the day, but the why that makes this day good. It's what makes it a day of rejoicing. Your debt has been paid; your sins are forgiven; death and hell have no power over you; you are free!

Therefore, live freely in faith in your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Crucified.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.