

Good Friday Homily 2008 (Year A)

Dorothy Sayers said, “It is curious that people who are filled with horrified indignation whenever a cat kills a sparrow can hear the story of the killing of God told Sunday after Sunday and not experience any shock at all.”(as set out in Barbara Brown Taylor, *God in Pain*) If there is ever a time for us to feel the shock, it is Good Friday.

I invite you now, over the next hours, to fully and completely enter into the reality of The Passion story. It is ugly business, I know, but I promise you that it is well worth the discomfort to fully enter into and completely share what Jesus went through for our sake.

It is a brutally hot day. The heat shimmers off the cobbled stones of the path on the way to the hill they call Golgotha – the skull. There is not a hint of a breeze. All the stirred up dust from their long walk up the hill still stands in the air – choking those who dare to take a deep breath.

He lifts his head. Every time he does so, there is a searing pain across his shoulders and neck, like a hot poker being applied between his shoulder blades. It almost hurts enough to make him forget for a second the spikes that hold his hands and his feet to the rough wood of the cross. As he lifts his head, he gulps another breath of the hot, dusty air. It is so hard to breath in this position. No one ever told him that asphyxiation is one of the ways that people die after being crucified.

Crucified. What a horrible end. Less than a week ago he came into the city amidst cheers and cries of “Hosanna.” Now, here he is, hanging between two thieves. Sentenced to die as a common criminal. A few days ago, he washed the feet of his friends and had supper with them one last time. He tried to explain to them again that he was going to a place where they could not follow. To this place! Where none of them wanted to follow. Only the women and one man were brave enough to come and offer prayers and comfort at the foot of the cross -- only these disciples whom he loves.

As he hangs there in agony – the excruciating pain of the nails magnified by the pain of the razor-sharp thorns in his scalp and the nauseating pain of the raw flesh on his back pressed against the wood – he thinks about how much worse than this physical pain is the agony of being taunted, made fun of and spit upon by the very people who had so recently worshiped him, as if he had somehow metamorphosed from Messiah into some sort of sub-human being. This emotional pain, laid atop the unbelievable physical suffering makes him recall with absolute clarity the Psalm that so perfectly describes his condition. He remembers the 22nd Psalm the way his mother taught it to him as a child.

My God, Abba, my dearest daddy, why have You forgotten me?

Why are You so far, abandoning me as I groan in misery?

O Abba, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet You are holy, praised through all generations.

In You our parents trusted; they trusted, and You did come to their aid.
To You they cried, and were heard; in You they trusted and were not disappointed.
But I seem as nothing, hardly alive; scorned and despised by many.
Those who see me make fun at my expense,
they ridicule and gossip among themselves;
“Commit yourself to the Most High; let Love deliver you,
you who delight in the Most High!”
Yet, You are the One who took me from the womb;
You kept me safe upon my mother’s breasts.
Upon You I was cast from my birth, and ever since my mother bore me,
You have been my strength.
Come close to me, for trouble is near and there is none to help.
Many, like bulls, surround me, they come at me with great force.
With fire in their eyes and bellowing roars, they charge at me.
I am poured out like water, and all my bones are weak;
My heart is like wax, melting within my breast;
My strength is broken as a shard of pottery, and my mouth is dry;
You have laid me in the dust of death.
Yes, boars are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me;
They have pierced my hands and feet – I can count all my bones –
They stare and gloat over me awaiting my demise;
They divide my belongings among them, avariciously casting lots.
But You, O God, Abba, daddy, be not far off!
You, who are my help, hasten to my aid!
Free my soul from this agony, my life from the power of the boar!
Save me from the mouth of the lion, my afflicted soul from the horns of the bull.

As he hangs there, he looks through blood-clouded eyes and sees his mother and the other disciples whom he loves. With the little breath he has left, he makes sure that they know they are to take care of each other.

He pushes his feet against the cross and raises his body for one more painful, ragged breath. He prays one last time silently – one more time – and he whispers, “It is finished.”