

GOOD FRIDAY

April 19 2019

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Excruciating.

It's a word used to describe the pain felt when we stump our toe,
or hit our thumb with a hammer.

The word actually means—out of the cross...
the suffering that comes from crucifixion.

Crucifixion was devised by the Romans to be the most torturous kind of execution.
It was very public, very shameful and could last a long time.

Crucifixions normally took place right by the path that ran into the city,
so passerby's could see the criminals and shame them.

For over their head was written their crime:
thief, murderer, adulterer, insurrectionist.

But it served another purpose.

As one came and went into Jerusalem, passing by,
they knew the Romans were serious about the law—
and you didn't want to break it,
and quite possibly wind up on the cross as well.

Crucifixion was so horrendous it was illegal for a Roman citizen to be crucified.
It was for slaves or foreigners—which meant the Jews were fair game.

The physical agony alone is enough to make us wince and weep.

The one to be crucified was tied or nailed to the crossbeam—sometimes both.

A nail through the hand is incredibly painful
but it couldn't hold the weight of man.

If it was just a nail, it would normally go through the radius and the
ulna—or the wrist would be tied to the cross and the nail was sent
straight through the hand—either way.

For the feet, a nail was driven straight through both,
but affixed to the cross was this little shelf that stuck out from the cross.

There was another little shelf behind the buttocks,
 because the way one died by crucifixion was slowly drowning—
 asphyxiation as it's called—as the fluids fill the lungs,
 pressing in on the heart and causing it to stop beating.

Before that happened though, the shoulders would pop out of joint and in order to breathe, one couldn't pull up with their arms, they had to push up with their feet.

This perhaps is the picture we should recall as we hear these/those seven last words of Jesus...as He would muster up His strength, inhale as much as He could and lift Himself up to speak the words which we treasure today. Speaking them were no easy task.

Normally it would take days to die on the cross.

The soldiers were immune to it all,
 giving wine or water to keep one alive.

But with Jesus...

He was already to the point of death before He even got to the cross.

He'd already been beaten once by the soldiers of the High Priest
 and then again by Pilate's soldiers—a beating which was an especially nasty sort.

The Romans had whips called the cat of nine tails.

They were either dipped in tar and then dragged across bone, glass and rock—
 or the bone, glass and rock were embedded into the leather straps.

Regardless, each strike would bite into the flesh and rip it off.

It was unusually cruel to have both a flogging and a crucifixion.

Normally they need one to be in relatively good health before going to the cross,
 so the suffering and torment might be prolonged.

Other things were incredibly painful.

We think of the OT reference of Jesus' beard being ripped out.

Or the crown of thorns pressed into His head.

The purple robe given Him to wear,
 done in mockery, covered His exposed back
 but then, was ripped off.

This is what was excruciating,
 making up the physical agony of the cross—the physical suffering of Jesus.

But this beloved is not what saves you.

It's what we typically think about, especially today/tonight.

But the physical agony of the cross

gives us a hint of the real suffering that Jesus endures.

There's a second type of suffering Jesus undergoes on the cross—
what we call the shame of the cross.

For instance, to spit in someone's face doesn't hurt them, but it is incredibly shameful.
And we consider this shame as we see the soldiers spitting on the face of Jesus.

Putting a purple robe on Him with a staff in His hand...

bowing down to Him, worshipping Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews."

What about when they blindfold Him, slap Him on the face and say, "Prophecy!"

"Tell us who hit you." I'm sure that was incredibly funny to them.

The shame of the cross is considered especially when we see the soldiers—
the ones on crucifixion duty that day gambling for the clothes of Jesus—

This meant they stripped Him naked.

Sure, we cover Jesus in our depictions for modesty's sake,
but the one to be crucified wore nothing.

With all of their shame and nakedness exposed.

People would walk by and throw rocks and jeer and mock.

"He trusted in God—let God heal Him."

"He healed others, why can't He heal Himself?"

"He trusted God, let God save Him."

You know, for Jesus, this was the only thing that He treasured; His trust in God...

And now this is open for mockery.

Even those crucified next to Him mocked Him—

trying to get a little something for themselves—

"If you are the Christ, save yourself and save us to."

There is a third suffering that Jesus undergoes in the crucifixion which is beyond His
physical suffering and beyond the suffering of shame.

And that is the spiritual suffering...

I can talk about it, you can contemplate it, but we can't understand it.

It is a suffering that we simply cannot comprehend.

It's indicated to us in the question Jesus cries out from the cross.

His fourth word out of seven.

He cries out, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?"

This is an astounding thing.

First of all, Jesus is being forsaken by God,

this is the spiritual suffering...

in that God the Father has turned His back on His Son.

That God the Father and the Son who lived in a never-ending and abiding love,
are rent apart from each other.

Isaiah says He was smitten by God and afflicted.

That God looks upon Christ,

who never did anything wrong and always did everything right

and God takes the Ten Commandments

and the weight of the entire Law

and He lowers the boom on Him.

It pleased Him to afflict Jesus.

God Himself is delighted to destroy His Son.

Because Jesus doesn't pray, "My God, My God You have forsaken Me..."

He prays "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?"

That Jesus in those three hours of darkness on the cross doesn't even know what

He's doing there, because if He did,

if He knew that He was there for you,

if He knew in those three hours of darkness that He was suffering

that you could have life, He would have some comfort.

If He knew that in three days He would be raised from the

dead, glorified and sit at the right hand of God,

there might be some way to endure this event.

But every single ounce of information,

every bit of knowledge,

or anything that could give Him comfort is

completely removed from Him.

So completely does Jesus drink from the cup of God's wrath.

So completely does He empty this cup, even to the dregs.

So completely is Jesus going to taste the bitter suffering and the agony of God's wrath
over sin, over your sin, that He has absolutely nothing to cling to, nothing to hold on to,
nothing to rely on, nowhere to look for help.

He has no comfort—only darkness, abandonment and the anger of God.

This, dear saints—this is the real suffering of the cross.

 This is the suffering that wins your salvation.

 This is the suffering that is your life.

And I suspect that why Jesus goes through all the physical suffering and all the shame of the cross is so that we could have some little sense of this third suffering that we will never know.

Do you understand what I mean?

Jesus was there suffering on the cross so that you wouldn't.

Jesus was there being abandoned by God so that you never would be.

Jesus had these three hours of darkness so that you would have an eternity of light and life and joy and peace.

And this is our fantastic joy in meditating on the cross of Jesus.

The answer to why God was forsaking Jesus was hidden from Him,
but it is not hidden from us.

 “My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?”

 The answer is because He loves you.

 He wants to forgive you and give you life.

It is a Good Friday because the suffering of Jesus
is an excruciating suffering that we will not share.

 It is a suffering that gives us peace
 an affliction that gives us hope
 an agony that gives us joy.

To which we say, “Thanks be to God.”

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.