

GOOD FRIDAY - 2006
“Glory to God”

And so we arrive at what many perceive as the end of the story, the ghastly torture and death of the man on whom so many had pinned their hopes. Yet, for those of us who see the Easter Triduum as the consummate drama, this is merely Act II. While there is more to come, we must enter this event to appreciate Act III, that wonderful “Third Day.” The first Good Friday was one of history’s most disgraceful days. Even setting aside the divinity of Jesus, how cruel it is to punish a person for doing good. People not familiar with the story would have to ask, like the rest of us, “Why?” In response to this gross injustice, too many people have tried to answer it in terms of justice. They make it seem that God required this torment as some kind of repayment for humanity’s countless faults and failings. But what kind of God is that? It makes God look so vindictive, every bit as cruel as those who paid 30 pieces of silver or yelled “*Crucify him!*”

In all truth, we could easily say that Jesus brought it all on himself by the way he chose to live, by his teaching, preaching and way of life. Jesus not only took on the devil, he took on “the system.” He took on the culture, both secular and religious. He took on the powers that be, and no one knew what he was doing better than Jesus himself. In John’s account of the gospel, Jesus sees what’s coming. He moves gradually toward the cross fully aware and willingly. He even stands before Pilate without flinching, telling him that he “*would have no power at all if it were not given from above.*” He even gets Pilate, the man with the power to crucify him, to ask him, the prisoner, “*What is truth?*” Yes, Pilate had the power, but Jesus was in control.

Unlike with the Matthew, Mark and Luke, John doesn’t see Jesus’ death as ignominious at all. It wasn’t humiliating, embarrassing or even

disgraceful to him. For John, there was no agony in the garden; instead, it is a moment of epiphany when Jesus reveals himself as “I AM.” He even heals the ear of one of his captors. We hear no cry of abandonment from the cross. Instead, Jesus stops the action and makes sure his mother will be cared for, like he was wrapping up all the loose ends before he died. And when the time is right, he declares simply, “*It is finished.*”

What is finished? His life? Yes. But that isn’t what he means. At last Jesus has finished the work he was sent by his Father to do. He came so we could have life and have it in abundance. He came that we may share his joy and that our joy may be complete. He came that we could enter the life of God and the life of God could enter us. He came to give us a peace no one could take from us. He came that we could have eternal life. In other words, he loved his own and he loved them to the end. That is to say, Jesus didn’t die to satisfy the demands of justice at all, that is, to appease a vengeful God. He died to satisfy the demands of love. He did what love called for, and in that steadfast love he brought the Father’s love to bear upon the world.

The flow of divine love that existed for all eternity became visible in the person of Jesus and we watched what that love looked like when he met the outcast, the sinner, the marginal, the wealthy, the powerful and the broken. We saw what love looked like when falsely accused, when betrayed, when denied. Though a victim, to be sure, Jesus never played the victim, and he never created a victim. In the eyes of John, the cross was not only Jesus’ hour, it was his finest hour. And in that supreme act of love, he glorified his Father. And he called us to live the way of love ourselves. It is the only way, the only true way, the only way that can give life and give it in abundance.