

Good Friday: Ave Crux

Good Friday, Holy Week, March 29, 2024.
Ave Maria Catholic Church, Fr. David M Vidal

The wood of the Cross, a symbol of suffering and death, has been transformed into a fruitful tree that brings salvation and eternal life to humanity. One of the most notable hymns of the Roman rite liturgy, the *Vexilla Regis*, proclaims: “*Ave Tree adorned and embellished in the purple of the King!*” This holy tree, the Cross, is adorned with the Blood of the Lamb.

We sing the praises of the Cross because our Savior died on the Cross.

During the reading of the Passion, through the different scenes, we perceive not only how Jesus suffered but also that He chose to suffer. With complete determination, Jesus walked the way of the Cross and did not stop until He gave His life for us on the Cross.

Peter tried to stop Him, but Jesus vehemently rejected Peter’s attempts. The apostles often insisted that He would not die and that they should not go to Jerusalem, but again, Jesus rejected those ideas. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus could have fled, but He did not. Before Pilate, Jesus could have defended himself, but He did not even try. Before Herod, Jesus remained silent. Jesus could have descended from the Cross, but He embraced it. It was not the nails but Jesus’s will to die on the Cross that kept Him firmly tied to it.

Why did Jesus embrace the Cross?

What was the motive that led Jesus to His Passion? Was it suffering for the sake of suffering? Was it pain for the sake of pain? A passion for the sake of pain is madness. However, Jesus’s Passion for God’s honor and glory and our eternal salvation is not madness but love.

Let us listen to Saint Paul, who says: “*Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,*” (Ephesians 5:2). Let us listen to St. Peter, who proclaims: “*Christ suffered for you,*” (1 Pet 2: 21). Jesus suffered for us to make us children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

If Jesus suffered and died for us, what would you do?

Let us consider what other people did.

In 1873, Father Damian arrived on Molokai to bring the gospel of Christ to those who suffered with leprosy. Then, after serving them and assisting them with the sacraments of the Church, Saint Damian of Molokai died of leprosy at the age of 49 in 1889.

In 1902, an 11-year-old Italian girl, St. Maria Goretti, received the crown of martyrdom by defending the virtue of purity and forgiving her offender. She preferred death before tarnishing her soul, and she received a crown of glory.

In 1928, St. José Sánchez del Río, a 14-year-old boy, after walking the way to his grave with lacerated feet, shouted with all his voice: *“Long live Christ the King!”* Then, he was killed by the soldiers of an anti-Catholic and anti-clerical government in Mexico that persecuted, arrested, and killed those who professed their faith in Christ.

In 1997, during a National Prayer Breakfast, just shortly before she passed away, an 87-year-old nun, St. Teresa of Calcutta, Mother Teresa, said to those considering abortion: *“Please don't kill the child. I want the child. Please give me the child. I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child.”*

All these men and women understood what Jesus did for them and were ready to imitate Jesus's love. If they could do extraordinary actions by imitating Jesus's love, how can we not?

This is the time to ask ourselves: *What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?*