



Good Friday

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

**St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Friday 7 April 2023**

Just over five years ago, the Archbishop gave me permission to travel with a group of teachers, Catholic Education Commissioners and catechists for the celebration of Holy Week in Jerusalem. Good Friday found us as guests at the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion.

We had already joined the Sisters for the Mass of the Last Supper the previous evening, which we celebrated in the basement chapel. On Good Friday, we were taken to a cavern beneath the chapel at the street level of Jerusalem of the first century, when Jesus lived.

The Gospel of St John today mentioned the name of that street: The Pavement, part of Hadrian's Plaza. It was constructed by the Romans in their efforts to make movement easier through this already ancient city, especially for their troops stationed in the city.

The Pavement was where Pilate brought Jesus to stand before the people for judgement and to be condemned to the cruel death by crucifixion. It was an enormous privilege to stand on the stones of the road and to celebrate, as we are doing today, the passion and death of Jesus, the Son of God.

The liturgy of Good Friday is somewhat stark and simple. We have had the first part: the Liturgy of the Word and the Passion from John's Gospel. Soon, we will join in the Veneration of the Cross, and lastly, we will have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion.

Each year the liturgy is the same. But our celebrating of it will be different, as our understanding of Good Friday deepens through the experiences we have had since last year. The Cross has appeared in our personal lives perhaps in many ways.

We have experienced the suffering of family members and friends as they struggled with illness; the horrible war that has brought dispossession and death to thousands of people in Ukraine; and deaths in custody, especially of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people. I will also bring in those prayers Fr Francisco Mascarenhas, who died in India this morning amongst his family. Fr Francisco has been ministering in the Archdiocese for many years until he became ill with cancer. Knowing that his death was coming soon, he was helped to return to his family in Goa.



As we shortly pray, we can bring to our celebration today, the sense of tradition, the awareness of being involved in something that goes back to the dawn of Christianity. To have stood on that road where Jesus, Pilate and the people gathered connects me to this tradition. There is something very encouraging in feeling that we are part of those many generations of the faithful who have prayed for all of humanity in such a solemn way as we are about to do. Imagine that we are joined to that enormous crowd of Christians who have prayed these Prayers of the Faithful, gathered with Christ as their head.

Good Friday is not meant to be a day of great sadness. Its mood is not meant to be sombre. The liturgy is restrained and solemn, but we are celebrating the triumph of the Cross, so we are filled with hope. The Cross is the focal point as it has become the means of our redemption.

The Readings have insisted in their own way on a vision of the Cross. It stands for the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, whose blood sets us free. The Cross was the instrument of humiliation, torture and death. This is in the past and a history for us to recall.

But for us now, the Cross is something glorious for by it Christ has made a way for us from death to life and new growth. This is why we celebrate the Triumph of Christ over all that can destroy us and the Cross is the symbol of his power and presence for us.

The Cross has a very special place in the homes of Christians, for above all, it reminds us of the presence of Christ, who is risen from death, has triumphed over every evil and offers us his strength in our trials every day.

Before Fr Francisco returned to Goa, I visited him in hospital and we spoke for some time. He asked me to give him a blessing, and after praying for him to have strength as he faced the last stage of his journey on this earth, I said, "Let us pray that we will see each other in heaven." Francisco answered, "This is our faith and it is what I believe."

The Cross for him, in his illness, pain and discomfort, had become redemptive and glorious, and he triumphed with the faith that had grown within him.