

Good Friday 2021

Two brothers lived together in the same apartment. The elder brother was an honest, hard-working and God-fearing man and the younger, a dishonest, gun-toting substance-abusing rogue. Many a night the younger man would come back into the apartment late, drunk and with a lot of cash and the elder brother would spend hours pleading with him to mend his ways and live a decent life. But the young man would have none of it.

One night the junior brother ran into the house with smoking gun and bloodstained clothes. "I killed a man," he announced. In a few minutes police surrounded the house and the two brothers knew there was no escape. "I did not mean to kill him," stammered the young brother, "I don't want to die." By now the policemen were knocking at the door. The senior brother had an idea. He exchanged his clothes with the bloodstained clothes of his killer brother. The police arrested him, tried him and condemned him to death for murder. He was killed and his junior brother lived. He died for his brother.

Naturally, we would expect the younger brother to respond with gratitude. Gratitude to his generous brother should make him turn a new leaf and never go back to a life of crime. He would be the most ungrateful idiot if he should continue living the sort of life that made his brother die, right?

Then what is our reaction to the story of the Passion we just read from the Gospel of John? That story reminds us that the *Grace* that we stand in didn't come cheap. When Jesus cried out, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?*" (Mt 27:46) we sense something of the terror of bearing the weight of the sin of all humanity. The paradox of the cross is that Jesus died for us, not **even though**, but rather **because** we don't deserve it. His death has made us God's friends. Jesus Christ paid a huge price for our salvation. All it will cost us is our pride and self-will. Sometimes it seems to us that this is too great a price, which only indicates how far removed we are from the details of Christ's sacrifice. We should be filled with gratitude - gratitude strong enough to make us hate sin of every shade; strong enough to make us translate our love of God into love of all God's people.

The paradox of the cross: a symbol of violence as the symbol of our salvation.

The cross is violence. But we must see how it is decidedly our violence, our unrighteousness. It is only God's violence in that God suffers it -- not only without retaliation but with Merciful Love. That is, the cross with Jesus on it, suffering the violence of our death penalty for our sin, because He loves us that much is our violence meeting and being overcome by God's unconditional love, and forgiveness, and power of life. So, the cross and its violence are precisely the answer we desperately need in order, finally, to give up all our failed attempts at peace through superior firepower. The cross is the answer we need, finally, to live with God's power of love and life, and the answer we need, finally, to let God lead our feet into the way of peace.

There is the story about a tyrannical teacher who used a hollow bamboo pipe to beat the children in his class in a village in South Africa. One day the teacher was sick and the children came to class and there was no one to teach them. The pipe lay on the teacher's desk - alone and ominous. Eventually one brave girl got up and touched it - much to the horror of the other kids. She took the pipe and using a classmate's pocketknife began cutting the pipe into pieces. Each piece she cut holes in and fashioned several small piccolos which she handed to the class and encouraged all to play the notes they could.

The next day when the teacher came back to school he was outraged to find his pipe missing and confronted the kids.

To his red, angry face the children stood up and began playing their mini flutes. The teacher's hatred was instantly transformed as he saw his tool of dominion transformed into instruments of beauty and celebration. Never again did he hit a child.

This is what Jesus did with his cross - transforming our hatred, ugliness and oppression into love, beauty and liberation.