

Good Friday

Jesus taught us how to live; now he is teaching us how to die. In Venerable Fulton Sheen's book *The Priest Is Not His Own*, he reflects on the wholly unique priestly role of Christ, a priesthood in which the priest and victim are one:

Christ the victim underwent an unimaginably painful death so that we wouldn't have to.

Unimaginably painful, because in his physical being, unimpaired by the effects of sin, Jesus was more in touch with His physical senses than any other human being who has ever lived, and even the first lash of the Roman scourge would have caused a physical pain more deeply felt than any we have experienced.

Unimaginably painful because in his psychological state, He felt not only the dread of all the anguish that was still to come, but also the feeling of utter loneliness and betrayal at having been abandoned by all but one of His chosen disciples.

Unimaginably painful, because at the spiritual level, Jesus did not merely destroy our sins; no, He *took them upon Himself*, and they became far more real to him that they have *ever* been to us. Indeed, that which seems too trivial, so slight, so easily forgivable in our eyes, He saw for what it truly is. St. John Henry Newman writes:

Alas! He had to bear what is well known to us, what is familiar to us, but what to Him was woe unutterable. He had to bear that which is so easy a thing to us, so natural, so welcome, that we cannot conceive of it as a great endurance, but which to Him had the scent and the poison of death— He had, my dear brethren, to bear the weight of sin; He had to bear your sins; He had to bear the sins of the whole world. Sin is an easy thing to us; we think little of it; we do not understand how the Creator can think much of it; we cannot bring our imagination to believe that it deserves retribution, and, when even in this world punishments follow upon it, we explain them away or turn our minds from them. But consider what sin is in itself; it is rebellion against God; it is a traitor's act who aims at the overthrow and death of His sovereign. Sin is the mortal enemy of the All-holy, so that He and it cannot be together; the All-holy drives it from His presence into the outer darkness.

We routinely fail to acknowledge sin for what it is: a spiritual suicide, a cosmic treason. At Calvary, our Beloved Master was under no such illusions. He was completely aware of the task He was about to undertake, and He did it willingly. For multiple hours He allowed His mind to be filled with all the darkness that has ever plagued humankind, so earnest was His desire to redeem us. It was the only way, yet it was the perfect way.

Although upon the cross, with the physical suffering that He endured being more excruciating than we could ever imagine, even this was nothing compared to the uttermost mental and spiritual pain which filled His soul; reverberating throughout His entire being. And through it all, He sensed that, with a mere blink of an eye, He could end everything, make the pain stop, or even just mitigate it by some small degree. But He would not sanction it.

Thus, He hung upon that sacred Cross as countless hosts of His adoring angels watched on in trembling and awe, as He undid the sin of Adam. In so doing, the King of the Ages, as St. Paul calls Him, transformed that scene of untold evil into the source of endless glory. He shined forth, even amidst the darkness of Calvary, as the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of Peace, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Ruler of this world, and the king of your heart and mine.

This is the king we serve, the King who died for us.