

## **Good Friday of the Lord's Passion** **Matthew O'Donnell**

### **Lectionary 40:**

Isa 52:13-53:12

[An account of the servant's suffering]

Ps 32:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25

[Father, into your hands I commend my spirit]

Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9

[Jesus, the High Priest, understands human weaknesses]

John 18:1-19:42 [The Passion Narrative of Jesus Christ]

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/041522.cfm>

### **Possible preaching themes**

- **Human suffering** has been a subject of theological reflection, psychological study, and scientific inquiry for centuries. "Why do people suffer or how do I endure suffering?" are questions that beg for a faith response.
- **Death** is an inevitable part of life. For Christians, the death of Jesus Christ reveals the promise of eternal life freely offered to every human person. Hope can be found in the promise of resurrection.
- One of the last words of Jesus commemorated on Good Friday is "I Thirst" (Jn 19:28). The **physical thirst** of Jesus, a condition that 1 in 3 human beings throughout the world also experience, can both reveal the deeper spiritual desires of human persons and be a call for social action.

### **Possible scientific resources**

- **The Nature and Treatment of Human Suffering** by Michael J. Brescia, MD  
<https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/july-august-2018/the-nature-and-treatment-of-human-suffering>
  - Suffering is a mingling of the psychological, emotional, and physical
  - Love becomes an important antidote to human suffering
  - Suffering calls for human connection, which can have effects both on the one suffering and one's family and friends
- **Thanatology** is the study of death and the experience of loss. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross offers a model for understanding the stages of grief associated with death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. <https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>
  - Grief is a natural response to death and an emotion that can also be experienced because of other life experiences
  - The stages articulated by Kubler-Ross are widely accepted by psychologists and grief counselors
  - The stages of grief are fluid and can occur in unique order for each person

- **Safe drinking water:** According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 3 people do not have access to safe drinking water <https://www.who.int/news/item/18-06-2019-1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicef-who>
  - Poor sanitation and lack of clean drinking water contributes to the spread of disease
  - Without water the human body is susceptible to organ failure and other physical side effects (like fatigue and persistent headaches)

### **Homily outline on Suffering (taking the 1<sup>st</sup> path above)**

- The **question of suffering** has occupied the minds and souls of people throughout history
  - A common question ministers and preachers are often asked to answer is “Why do I have to suffer?”
  - This question, and questions like it, unearth the depth of uncertainty, pain, fear, and grief that suffering can cause
  - For Christians, human suffering can be redemptive and unite one’s own experience of suffering with Jesus’ experience of human suffering
  - Suffering begs for a human and spiritual response; the virtues of hope and love can be powerful antidotes to fight the effects of suffering
- The **Passion Narrative** the evangelist John offers reveals the experience of Jesus’ own human suffering. The suffering of Jesus was physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual
  - Physical: “...there they crucified him...” (John 19:18). Jesus was struck (John 18:22), endured carrying the weight of a cross, and experienced the physical pain of crucifixion
  - Psychological: “...They cried out, ‘Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!’...” (John 19:15). Jesus experienced rejection and abandonment from the crowds and his close friend Peter (John 18:15-18, 25-27)
  - Emotional: “...Woman behold your son...Son, behold your mother” (John 19:26-27). Jesus confronted the emotional effect his death would have on his mother and disciples
  - Spiritual: “...My kingdom does not belong to this world...” (John 18:36). Jesus takes on the sins of all humanity
- **Human Experiences of Suffering**
  - Often, suffering can feel like a lonely and all-encompassing experience
  - Suffering is an inevitable and universal human experience, and one that produces a symphony of human emotions
  - Like Jesus, our suffering is
    - Physical: disease, domestic violence, gun violence, food insecurity
    - Psychological: depression, anxiety, fear, shame
    - Emotional: distress, embarrassment, abandonment, rejection, loss
    - Spiritual: anger, question of God’s presence, searching for the meaning of one’s life
  - There are times when our suffering may be acute and seasons when it feels chronic
  - How do we respond to suffering?
    - We avoid
    - We bury
    - We medicate
    - Sometimes, we embrace
  - Jesus’ own suffering, and his willingness to accept death so that we may have life, becomes a powerful sign that we do not suffer alone
- **Hope and Love**

- Jesus responds to suffering by sharing hope and love
- The suffering of Jesus makes visible the love of God
  - This paradox conveys that through human suffering love can be found
  - In moments of suffering the love of God remains
- The discovery of God's love in life's most challenging moments instills hope
  - ...that we are never alone
  - ...that our suffering can lead to greater dependence on God
  - ...that healing and new life will come
- We are entrusted with a mission as disciples of Jesus, as members of the human family; we can share love and hope to those who are hurting
  - By being present (physical)
  - By forging human connection (psychological)
  - By speaking words of comfort (emotional)
  - By the prayers we share (spiritual)
- Good news is found in remembering and celebrating that Jesus' Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday
  - Suffering and death never have the final word
  - But before resurrection is experienced, we confront the suffering of the Cross—we name our own crosses
- Our suffering can be redemptive when we allow them to draw us closer to God
  - Depending on social status, the experience of suffering may be different for each person
  - *Salvifici Doloris* ([https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1984/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_11021984\\_salvifici-doloris.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html))
  - Jesus is close to us in our suffering because of his own experience of suffering
  - It is in this closeness that we can find hope and experience the gift of divine love

**Tags:** death, hope, loneliness, love, suffering,

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### **About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative**

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.

