Peace be with you! As many of you know, here at the Cathedral we have a beautiful fountain in our courtyard. It’s titled “The Forgiveness Fountain.” Inscribed at the base of the fountain are the words from the Lord’s Prayer: ”Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Jesus put what he taught into practice in last Palm Sunday’s Gospel from St. Luke, when he said from the cross: “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

“What forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing?” questions St. Augustine in his famous fourth-century homily on this passage. Then he continues: “He prayed as man, and as God with the Father, he heard the prayer. Even now he prays in us, for us and is prayed to and by us. He prays in us as our high priest. He prays for us as our head. He is prayed to and by us as our God.”

Tonight’s Passion from St. John underscores this human prayer of Jesus – this prayer in the flesh. Pilate declares: “Behold the man!” Jesus says to John: “Behold your mother.” Jesus turns to his mother: “Behold your son!”

Terrible things happen in life. Terrible suffering comes upon us. This suffering is often unavoidable and unjustified. The death of a loved one. The separation from family far away in order to survive and support our family. Gang banging and violence. The loss of our culture. The sense that we are strangers and foreigners in our own town – be we English speakers or Spanish speakers. Among our elderly there is loneliness and abandonment sometimes by children. A loss of a job. The loss of a child. A reverse in our finances. A debilitating illness. Terrible things can happen in our life.

This year’s Good Friday collection for the Holy Land reminds us that terrible things happen in our world. The suffering of war, the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land, the violent conflict between branches of Islam. Today we have the largest refugee crisis in the world. We see acts of terrorism. Acts of anti-Semitism. In the Middle East, the Catholic Church is often the only institution on the ground educating the young – young who are mainly followers of Islam – but whose parents desire a better life for their children and an end to the cycle of violence. Terrible things go on in our world.

What’s our response? Our response is the response of Jesus: “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.” This is the attitude we bring to our prayer and worship tonight. We bring before the wood of the cross all of our pain and all of the suffering we see in the world. We lay it before Jesus. We place our confidence in the prayer dynamic captured so well by St. Augustine. We trust that this all too-human Jesus, whose tortured face we see with the words of Pilate
“Behold the Man,” will now bear again our darkness, our sin and the scandalous suffering of the world. By our gesture of reverence for the cross, we become more ourselves, more human, and thus more like Christ – more Christian, more the person God intends us to be.

Friends, I dare say there is not one of us unmoved by the fire this Monday of Holy Week at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Yet perhaps the most dramatic photo I saw was that of the golden cross of Notre Dame gleaming and shining in the midst of darkness. That golden cross shone over and above the rubble of a collapsed roof. That same is true for us, too, when we allow our forgiveness of those who harm us to shine forth from our lives as flowers of Jesus. May we “Behold the Man.” May we “Behold our Mother.” May we “Behold our Son.” As we reverence the cross, may our words be those of Jesus: “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” Peace be with you!