

Uniting our Sufferings to Those of Christ

Homily for Good Friday 2020

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19-42

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Peace be with you! How do we unite our sufferings to those of Christ on the cross? How do we place before the crucified Christ the many victims of the COVID-19 pandemic? Gazing on the crucified Christ, how do we unite the fatiguing hard labor of so many medical personnel, so many family care givers?

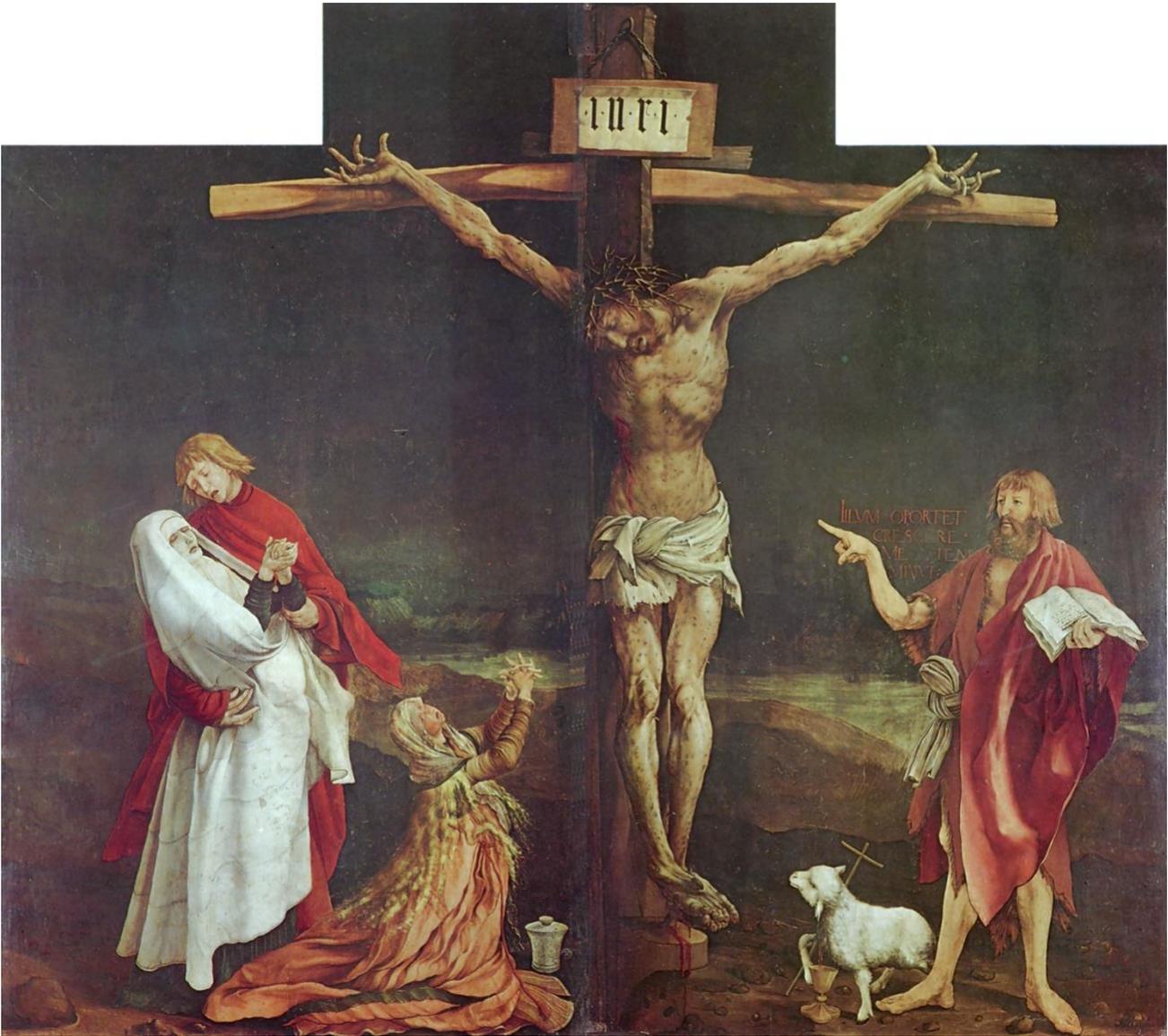
A few years back, while visiting near the region of Germany where my family roots and language dialect lie, I had the opportunity to slip across the border into France. I visited the town of Colmar and its fine art museum. There I saw one of the most gruesome depictions of the crucified Christ. I have its image now on our Diocese of Yakima Facebook page. Painted between 1510 and 1516 for a hospital chapel in Isenheim, it depicts the crucified Christ with pockmark wounds from the bubonic plague. In four years, 50 to 60 percent of Europe died of this plague. It took nearly 200 years for Europe to restore its lost population. Physicians at the time did not know about its transmission. They did not know how to stop



its spread. The artist, Matthias Grünewald, actually painted his work in the hospital where it eventually was displayed. Grünewald saw the awful suffering of those dying of the plague.

Today when we gaze at Matthias Grünewald's depiction of Christ crucified, it can evoke in us feelings of fear for our own fate in the face of illness. Yet those dying of the plague often found comfort gazing on this particular image of the crucified Christ. Patients could see their same wounds graphically depicted on the body of Christ as he hung upon the cross. Seeing Christ bearing the same wounds as theirs, those dying in the hospital knew that they were not dying alone.

We can do the same. Permit me to suggest three areas of our lives that we might want to place at the foot of the cross: (1) Our regrets. (2) Our sins. (3) Our resolutions.



First, our regrets: When we gaze back across our life what do we regret? Regrets might not only include past sins which were already forgiven. Regrets can include missed opportunities. There may have been chances to love others we might have missed. Cues from loved ones to become more compassionate that we did not read. Harmful deeds we did to others that rippled out in ways we never expected. Actions we could have taken to help those around us. Regrets can also include our indifference to the plight of the unborn. Without the right to life for the unborn, there are no other human rights.

Do we regret the many that live in the shadows of society: the undocumented, those living in poverty, the homeless, the unemployed, the sick, the aged and the dying? Do we regret that fact that half the children in Yakima County live in poverty? Do we regret our complicity and our indifference? Before the crucifix, can we name our regrets?

Second, our sins: Thanks to the fine work of a Jesuit priest here in the Pacific Northwest, Father Bill Watson S.J., I have become much more familiar with making a general confession of life. A general confession is different from the usual confession of sins we make to a priest from time to time. Making

a general confession of life means we review our past sins – sins most likely already forgiven through the grace of the sacrament – along with our current sins. Taking a longer “life-long” view, we try to excavate the deeper sources of sin in our life. We map out patterns and detect the triggers that move us away from God and towards our sinful self. We go beyond the routine list of wrongs we have done. We chart the path that leads us away from God so that God has a pathway to re-enter our hearts. As we gaze at the crucifix, what are our sins? What are the patterns and triggers behind our sins?

Third, our resolutions: Identifying our regrets and mapping out the pattern of sin prepares us to draft out some resolutions. The Church’s Rite of Penance describes “contrition” with its Greek word: “metanoia.” “Metanoia” means a profound change of mind and heart. Are we resolved to love God above all else? Are we resolved to love our neighbor and even the stranger as the chief expression of our love of God? Are we resolved to seek God’s grace to break the patterns of sin in our life? Embedded in this Greek concepts of “Metanoia” is a firm resolution not to sin. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis has elevated the venerable spiritual practice of “perfect contrition” because so many cannot go to confession. Simply put, “perfect contrition” refers to a sincere, humble and complete confession of our sin along with a firm resolve to seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible. (See Catechism of the Catholic Church 1452). As I gaze at the crucified Christ, what resolutions will I make about my life going forward?

Matthias Grünewald, in painting his graphic Isenheim crucifix, wanted to make sure that those suffering a terrible death knew they were not alone. He wanted them to see Jesus with the same wounds as theirs. That is my hope for you today. I would like to underscore the words of Pope Francis who notes “Having faith does not mean having no difficulties, but having the strength to face them, knowing we are not alone.”

You are not alone even in this hour of death. I am not alone either. We are together, now, before the crucified one. We know that because Jesus conquers death through his bodily resurrection that there is yet another chapter to be written, even on the other side of the COVID-19 crisis. As bishop, I am praying with you. Our Holy Father Pope Francis is praying with you. May we place at the foot of the cross all of our sorrows, all of our sins, all of our sufferings, all of our burdens. May we do so, knowing that none of us is alone. Jesus is near. Even now he bears our wounds. He intercedes for us. He is with us now in our hour of need. Peace be with you!