

GOOD FRIDAY  
April 18, 2014

There is a long tradition on this day to give a sermon on the seven last words of Jesus on the Cross. I have never given a homily on Good Friday but I will try to carry on the tradition of the last words but only the last three, which are from the Gospel of John.

When Jesus saw his mother at the foot of the cross and John the evangelist beside her he spoke to them saying, "Woman behold your son, and to John, behold, your mother." Then we read, "From that hour the disciple took her into his home."

For people my age and older, Catholic families usually had two pictures on the walls of their homes – one of the Sacred Heart and one of Mary. Many of the old Irish families also said the rosary every night after supper. These traditions are mostly gone now but it was a way of doing what John did, bringing Mary into his home; as far as I know the public recitation of the rosary has never been part of the monastic day. We had the Divine Office as our central prayer. However there is somewhat of a monastic connection to Mary and John taken from a teaching of Origen. He said, no one can understand John's Gospel unless he has laid his head on Jesus' breast and received Mary as his mother. In other words there is another type of knowledge of Sacred Scripture besides scholarly research. There is a wisdom born of love and intimacy with Jesus and Mary. Monastic spirituality esteems this type of wisdom. It is compared to the sense of taste – taste and see that the Lord is good. When you taste something very good your memory holds it in your mind for a very long time. Each night at the Salve we remember the sweetness of Mary.

The second phrase of Jesus is, "I thirst." Once when riding a bus on her way to a retreat Mother Teresa heard these words spoken to her from the Lord. She heard them several times and knew that the Lord was thirsting for souls, the souls of the poorest of the poor – the ones Mother Teresa served when she was allowed to start her own congregation. The sense of thirst is acute unless it is quenched. Jesus was no doubt speaking of physical thirst but also of a spiritual thirst that we all want to have: a thirst to help others as we have been helped by grace; a thirst for the fulfillment of our vocation; a thirst for prayer and inner silence; a thirst to hear that word from Jesus in our lectio. Jesus thirsts for the love of each one of us.

Finally Jesus says, "It is finished." John adds "and bowing his head he handed over his spirit." Luke has Jesus saying, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." This is what we all want to say when we are dying, at least in our heart if we are unable to say it with our voice. We don't know what is going on in the heart of a dying person. When the body is preoccupied with closing down, the spirit may be coming alive and be in intimate dialogue with its savior. The words, Jesus "bowed his head" – *inclinatio capite* in the Vulgate – have an echo in the Rule of St. Benedict when he describes the perfect monk as the one who takes this final gesture of Jesus, his last bodily movement,

and makes it the preferred bearing of the monk: “*inclinato sit semper capite,*” “always with his head bowed.” In fact you can go through the steps of humility in the Rule and find Scripture verses pertaining to the passion of Jesus at each step. Here at the end the monk bows his head as a way of union in the death of Christ.

So the cross of Christ is never far from the eyes of our soul. St. Aelred says we make our profession on the Cross. So in our daily life let us take up our cross, whatever it may be, and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Today in the liturgy let us adore the Cross knowing that it brought salvation to the world.