

Good Friday—the Liturgy of the Veneration of the Cross: The Power of the Cross

On the top of a cliff that overlooks Kaluapapa, the former leper colony on the Hawaiian Island of Molokai, there is a symbol and a sign. The symbol and sign are simple. Their meaning profound. Overlooking this place of horrors, where diseased humans were thrown off ships and, if they did not drown, were forced to live in a condition worse than animals with no protection from the elements, no food, no medicine, and no laws, there is the reminder of the transformation of Kaluappa into a civilized, caring, Christian community, all brought about by St. Damien DeVeuster, the Belgian missionary who embraced the lepers and became one of them. The sign on that cliff reads, “Love never fails.” The symbol is the cross.

The Power of the Cross is the power of Sacrificial Love. Jesus accepted and embraced the cross as a complete act of love for His father and for His Father’s people, for us.

Part of this afternoon’s liturgy has a mournful aspect to it. We join Mary and John and the disciples in weeping over the death of the most beautiful man to live. But this is only one aspect of the liturgy. Far more significant is the Triumph of the Lord over the forces of hatred that crucified Him and that persecute those who belong to Him. When the cross is uncovered we sing, “This is the Wood of the Cross on which hung the Savior of the world.” What does that mean, the Savior of the world? Go back to Damien the Leper. Kaluapapa was in grip of evil. Not only were the lepers treated like animals, they treated each other like animals. But sacrificial love transformed this community in God’s people. The Cross saved them from evil. The world before Jesus was a place in the grip of evil. But sacrificial love is transforming the world into God’s Kingdom.

The work begun by the Lord must be continued by us, his disciples. We share in the Power of the Cross by merging our lives with our Savior’s life. That is what it means to be a Christian. When we venerate the Cross, as we will in a few moments, we are performing the symbolic action that both recognizes Christ’s Sacrifice and commits us to participate in His Sacrifice.

For there are many in our world suffering from sin and the result of sin. There are many who depend on us to make the Sacrificial Love of the Lord a reality. We embrace the cross this afternoon and humbly ask the Lord to let his Power, the Power of the Cross, flow through us for others. And no matter what limitations we each may have, be they our battles against sin in our own lives, battles against the effects of sin in our families, in our society and throughout the world, there is nothing that can prevent the Triumph of Jesus Christ.

Love never fails.