

HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS

The Passion of the Lord

Good Friday

March 24, 1978

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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

John 18:1-19:42

After listening to the Word of God on this afternoon of Good Friday, this narration of the tragedy of Calvary, it might be best to remain silent and from the depths of our hearts give thanks to God and adore the Divine Redeemer. But it is necessary, in fact, it is the obligation of the celebrant to apply this Eternal Word to the lives of those who are living this liturgical celebration. The liturgy is not simply a remembrance of past events; rather the liturgy makes these events present now.

Here in the Cathedral, on this March afternoon of 1978, Christ offers the inexhaustible source of his redemption to those who have come here with faith and hope to contemplate this mystery of redemption. It is as though the events that have just been narrated were passing before our eyes at this moment, as if we were now being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus that was poured out on Calvary.

The three readings point out to us the greatness of this gesture of love, this gesture of redemption. The first reading presents us the image of the crestfallen Jesus and his profound humiliation --- there is really no adequate word to describe the image presented to us. The second reading from the letter to the Hebrews exalts this humiliated person on the cross and tells us that at the altars of heaven we have the High Priest of our salvation. The beautiful reading of the Passion by the three seminarians tells us how all of this occurred, that is, how this humiliation and exaltation took place.

In a few moments we will enter what might be called the heart of the Good Friday liturgy, namely, the adoration of the cross. This is not a sad ceremony but a ceremony that proclaims the triumph of the cross. Therefore we sing triumphal hymns in front of the banner that has been raised on high throughout history: the holy cross. The cross proclaims Christ's humiliation and at the same time proclaims the exaltation of the Son of God as the redeemer of humankind. For this reason, with the fullness of faith, we listen attentively to the passion narrative that was written by the mystical hand of Saint John the evangelist and there we discover that all the events appear to be a hymn of triumph, triumph even during the most humiliating hours of that narrative. Saint John places these events within his vision of heaven and triumph. When he speaks of Jesus' pain and bloodshed, he places these events within the context of his heavenly vision: the silent Lamb who is humbled is the Son of God who will be, and who is, this afternoon, the exalted Lamb of God.

The Servant of God takes on his shoulders the sins of all

My sisters and brothers, my first thought today is the same as the prophet Isaiah: *The Servant of God is like a lamb led to the slaughter; (a) he bore the iniquities of all people! We saw him and his appearance was beyond that of mortals.(b) He was good looking and now his appearance would attract no one. We were afraid to look at him. He was spurned and we held him in no esteem. He was killed in a most horrible way, in a way that no other person experienced. He was tortured and humiliated and put to death but he conquered!.* Through the inspiration of God, the prophet Isaiah anticipated events that would occur seven centuries later, events that we are celebrating this afternoon: the humiliation of the Lamb.

There are no other more adequate words than those that we have just heard. It was for this reason that I said at the beginning of this homily that perhaps it is better to remain silent, to love and meditate and behold --- behold the repugnance of Jesus' face (like a worm that buries himself among the saliva and blood of the earth). What happened to Jesus was unheard of for he became an outcast of humanity. Yes, it is so difficult to describe all of this my sisters and brothers and for that reason each Good Friday we take this time to reflect on this victim who bore the consequences of our sins. Christ does not die because of something that he did, rather he becomes responsible for the sins of all people. If we want to reflect on the seriousness of our sins we simply have to look at Christ and in honesty say: *I have caused this situation! I killed this man in order to cleanse myself! He was stricken and afflicted in order to cleanse me of my abominations.(c) He became abominable! As Scripture says: Though he had done no wrong, nor spoken any falsehood, yet the Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity (d).* This is Jesus, the lightning rod of humanity --- for all the lightning bolts of divine anger were directed toward him in order to free us. We are the ones who should have been crushed since each time that we have sinned we have caused this evil to take place.

My sisters and brothers, it is sad that during this Holy Week we, as Christians, do not weep profoundly because of the pain and suffering that we have inflicted on Jesus. Even more, instead of purifying ourselves and repenting and changing our lives, we make Holy Week a time for more sin. As if we have not already placed a heavy burden on Jesus' shoulders, we continue to sin and offend the Lord and thus add to the heavy burden that he bears.

As we reflect on the depths of Jesus' humiliation, as we behold Jesus nailed to the cross, the Word of God invites us to try to understand the mystery that unfolds in our midst. If Jesus, nailed to the cross, is the representative of the pain and humiliation of all people then we must discover the suffering of our people. In the person of Jesus we discover that it is our people who are tortured, crucified, spat upon and humiliated. But we also discover that it is Jesus who gives our difficult situation a sense of redemption.

It is not strange, my sisters and brothers, that as people experience the humiliation of Christ, they want to unburden themselves from the cross and break free of the nails and the whip lashes --- they want to be free. Thus liberators arise in the midst of our people but many give a false meaning to this liberation. My sisters and brothers, on this Good Friday afternoon, I would like us to look at the crucified Jesus and see in his mutilated body the people of El Salvador who are also sacrificed --- for in this way we can come to understand the meaning of the redemption that Jesus offers us in his blessed body and blood. The key to this understanding is very simple: just listen to the seven words that were uttered by those

dying lips. In those words we discover a living witness to the spirit that he has left us. In those words we come to understand the ideals of Christian liberation.

Pope Paul VI has said that the Church today cannot be indifferent to the people's desire for liberation. (e) If the Church wants to be an authentic Church of redemption then she must take upon herself the anxieties, pain, and sufferings of the People of God. After the Pope had listened to the raised voices of many bishops, he spoke about the liberation that the Church offers humankind and said that if the Church, in her desire for liberation, allowed herself to be manipulated by forms of liberation that are not Christian, manipulated by a liberation based on hatred, revolution and violence, then the Church would not be offering the true redemption of Jesus Christ. (f)

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, those who are very sensitive to the social situation of our world and who sincerely desire a better world, those who want to wipe away the saliva from the face of our nation, those who want to cleanse the face of our nation from the stains of blood, listen to the words of the great liberator Jesus Christ who speaks to us about the liberation that the Church and the Christian community ought to offer to this nation of ours, to the world, and to our present situation.

The seven words of Jesus on the cross

Listen to this first word of Jesus: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do* (g). Look at how the Liberator distances himself from hatred, resentment and vengeance. He could have unleashed all the forces of nature and destroyed those who crucified him. He could have freed himself and turned his persecutors into dust. One day as his disciples John and James experienced the ingratitude of the Samaritans who refused them lodging, they asked Jesus to send fire upon that city. Jesus responded and said: *You do not understand, the Son of Man had come to seek and save what was lost and to give his life for the salvation of all* (h). This is Christian liberation. Christians in the Church must offer their collaboration in the process of achieving liberation for our people but must do this with an attitude of love and forgiveness. Their petition must be Jesus' prayer: *Father, forgive them...!* (i).

The second word is spoken to the good thief. The good thief discovers that his companion on the cross is more than a man and says: *Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom* (j). The divine crucified Jesus turns toward the thief and says: *Today you will be with me in Paradise*. The liberator of people knows that paradise is not found here on earth but like the thief who hangs from the cross, one can aspire to paradise and one will actually achieve that paradise if one has faith. Liberation, my sisters and brothers, Christian liberation is transcendent. Christians know that on this earth they will not find Paradise. Yet this does not mean that we can now fall asleep. Our religion is not the opium of the people. Our religion is not one of conformity with reality as it is. Our religion does not allow us to become lazy. Rather our religion cries out and says: *develop yourselves, lift yourselves up, become better and do all of this with hope in a paradise that exists beyond history*. This, however, does not mean that we sit back and await heaven or conform ourselves with all that occurs here on earth or allow ourselves to become enslaved. In no way can we do this! Christians also know that Paradise has to be reflected here on earth. Those who work for the establishment of a kingdom of heaven in their relationships with others, those who seek to establish more human and less oppressive relationships with their brothers and sisters, those who seek for a greater equality among all people and feel that we are called to live together as sisters as brothers, those people know that it is necessary to reflect the kingdom of heaven

here on earth so that the pilgrim people of this earth might be happy here on earth and also in eternity.

The following word is a loving dialogue with his most holy mother and with his beloved disciple: *Woman, behold your son! Son, behold your mother* (k). My sisters and brothers, Christ's liberation is tenderness and love; it is the presence of a loving mother, Mary. Mary is a model for those who collaborate with Jesus in the process of establishing liberation on the earth and desire to possess heaven. In her hymn of thanksgiving Mary proclaims the greatness of God and says that God will humble the proud and exalt the humble. (l) She teaches us that the road of true liberation and Christian redemption is found on the road of humility and love and commitment. Like Mary, we are invited to love ourselves and one another and discover with her the road that leads us to Jesus.

As Jesus hung from the cross he experienced fever, thirst, loss of blood and so with dried lips cries out a summer complaint: *I thirst!* (m). Jesus' liberation does not deny physiological anxieties of the human person but rather experiences the lack of food of those who are hungry and the anguish of thirst of those who do not receive a living wage that enables them to provide bread for their families. My sisters and brothers, Jesus' thirst is a sign of his solidarity with those who journey this earth with so many temporal anxieties. It is also a sign that his redemption is intimately involved with the welfare of our throats and stomachs, with the welfare of our human body. Redemption is concerned about the illiteracy rate and the lack of adequate housing and all those other needs that make the world the road that leads us to God and to full human development. Jesus' thirst is an authentic thirst. Some mystics have attempted to interpret Jesus' thirst as some mysterious thirst of his soul. This is possible but it is very clear that here the evangelist is speaking about a true thirst, a thirst for water. Jesus wanted water and instead *they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth* (n).

After, the anguish of spirit suffered by Jesus showed itself in the mysterious cry of someone who feels alone in his pain. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (o) Brothers and sisters, when the hour of trial comes, the hour in which faith becomes dark, when hope is eclipsed, when it seems people are left without any resource, don't forget this Good Friday afternoon; he also felt the anguish, the mystery of being abandoned even by God, he felt himself without the love of the Father, without hope in his life. How extraordinary, brothers and sisters, that in times of anguish, torture, unjust imprisonment, situations that have no explanation, we turn to the Father with the trust of a son and say: *My God, why have you abandoned me?* But with the assurance that God is only testing the will in obedience and love to save our human anguish.

Jesus sees that everything has been fulfilled and cries out with a voice that appears to be the voice of creation: *It is finished!* (p). How beautiful is the life of the human person who at the hour of death returns to the Father's house and is able to say: *In all the details of my life I have reflected the divine will!* On the other hand, it is most sad to come into the presence of God and be reprimanded. Here we refer to those who were rebellious and come into God's presence and say: *Lord, I did not obey your laws. I believed I was free and that freedom was found in ignoring your commandment. I did not seek happiness in your laws but in doing my will, in following my passions and becoming involved in vice.* How beautiful is life, my sisters and brothers, when despite the trials, we know that in everything we follow the will of God. This afternoon, let us be concerned to reflect the message of the dying Jesus in our own life, in a life that we willingly hand over to Jesus' most holy will.

Jesus' final word is one of confidence for he places his life and death in the arms of God. From Jesus' lips we hear words of his confidence: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!* (q). At the hour of our death may we also experience the presence of the Father who embraces our life and spirit and leads us to the long awaited transcendence. Hopefully we have left behind on earth a struggle that was inspired in love and faith and hope and not a struggle of blood and violence! My sisters and brothers, it would be most sad to see in the shadows of our footsteps people who were tortured, disappeared, killed --- it would be sad to see the trails of terrorism, crime, and fire. How will we give an account before God for the bloodstained hands that whipped and beat our sisters and brothers? What a sad hour if we cannot say: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* (Luke 23:46). What a sad hour if at the time of our death we cannot present to God a spirit that worked on earth with love and hope and faith but only a spirit that was involved in a bloody struggle that God wanted no part of!

Christ has not died

My sisters and brothers, in front of the body of Christ, we reflect on the second reading and Saint Paul's words: *Christ has not died!* The most beautiful reality of Holy Week does not occur this afternoon. It is true, perhaps the most moving moment occurs this afternoon for we see that God so loved us that he became one with us and, with equal love, died for us. What is beautiful is the fact that the death of Jesus was sealed by the power of God and within three days, on Saturday night, we will sing together the victory of the resurrection, the victory of light over darkness --- a victory that was also sealed by the power of God. This victory affirms the fact that the sacrifice of the One who took on the sins of humankind and who was nailed to the cross has been accepted. Now those who want to be forgiven can be forgiven if they live in solidarity with the passion and death of Jesus Christ, if they understand that no matter how great their sins and crimes, God can and will pardon them.

Therefore my sisters and brothers we pray a special prayer of the faithful during this afternoon's liturgy. At this time the Church feels that her heart is like Mary's, as wide as the world, with no enemies or resentments. The Church now prays for everyone --- prays that sinners might be converted; prays that those who spit on her and slander her will not die in disgrace with hatred, but prays for their conversion; prays for those who like the good thief know they have offended God but repent and recognize Jesus as the one who offers salvation and ask to be with him in Paradise. We are going to pray for government officials so that they might be instruments of God and establish peace and justice in the world and not trample on the dignity of the human person. We are going to pray that those who lack faith might discover the road of light and faith and happiness --- a road that is open to them because of the blood that Jesus shed this afternoon. My sisters and brothers, Saint Paul tells us that *we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens* (r). From heaven this High Priest, with no trace of vengeance but with infinite love speaks to us through the voice of the Church that is on pilgrimage here on earth and tells us that he loves us when we die on the cross; he tells us that he loves us what we follow in his footsteps. Therefore, let us pray...

Margin References (a) Is 53,4,7: (b) Is 53,2-3: (c) 2Cor 5,21: (d) Gal 3,13: (e) EN 30: (f) EN 32: (g) Lk 23,34: (h) Lk 9,55-56: (i) Lk 23,24: (j) Lk 23,42-43: (k) Jn 19,26-27: (l) Lk 1,46-55: (m) Jn 19,28: (n) Jn 19,29: (o) Mk 15,34: (p) Jn 19,30: (q) Lk 23,46: (r) Hb 4,14.