

Some people have said to me that they don't come to Church on Good Friday because it's depressing. I would like to suggest that the crucifixion of Jesus is not what is depressing, what is depressing. After all, what is depressing about obedience, about fidelity, about a deep love that makes one willing to die for others?

What's depressing about the Passion of Jesus is that it is a story of betrayal by one's friends; it is a reminder that even those with good intentions, like Peter, can sometimes end in denial of what they think is most important. The Passion reminds us of what happens when people refuse to get involved, along the sidelines. The death of Jesus is depressing because it comes as the result of human self-centeredness. The story of Jesus' crucifixion is depressing because it reminds us that even those close to the Lord abandoned him at the crucial time of his life.

What's hard about Good Friday is that we are reminded of all that. What is most difficult is that we must face the fact that such behavior is not just history -- it continues right up to our own day.

There is still betrayal; we still deny our beliefs when it gets sticky or uncomfortable; there are still people who refuse to get involved; there is still self-centeredness; there are still people who turn away from the Lord and abandon him. The very things which led to the crucifixion of Jesus still happen today--things aren't very different at all.

There was a time when people declared that "God is dead." Aren't there times it seems like God is dead, even in a world where millions in a world profess to believe in God, who claim to be Jesus' disciples, in fact do not live like his disciples? And it happens every day -- in the name of pleasure, in the pursuit of self-fulfillment; in the desire for comfort and leisure; in the maintenance of the status quo; in the protection of one's power and authority; in the avoidance of reform.

Jesus' example of obedience, even when it painful or might result in our death, calls us to follow that example. It calls us to self-sacrifice (to give up for ourselves so that others may prosper); it calls us to consistently give of ourselves and to be concerned about others. The death of Jesus calls us to spread the Good News that God had died for our sake.

The death of Jesus shouldn't lead to a defeatist attitude of "What's the point?" Rather, it calls us to a sense of adventure, a sense of heroism, a sense of renewed dedication. We can go out into the world and accomplish the tasks God has given us. The Good News is: We do not have to worry about the power of death--it is not a threat. I do not have to spend my time and my energy figuring out how to save myself, how to work my way into God's favor; that has already happened through Jesus. My time and efforts do not have to be concentrated on myself, but on getting the word out to others. I do not have to worry about God's wrath or punishment if I make a mistake or even fail--he has freed me from the power that has in my life. The burden of failure and death was nailed to the cross.

Today is not called Bad Friday--a day of depression. It is called Good Friday -it is a day of God's glory, a day of fulfillment. Good Friday is good because we see that a human being can be perfectly obedient to God.

We can too -- because we have been set free from the chains of our sin. Even now we are invited to share in the work which he started, so that one day we can also share in his victory over death. And that is far from depressing!