



Good Friday | Beware of the idols we construct

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, we come together today, to give heartfelt thanks, for Christ's sacrifice for the world, on that Friday over 2,000 years ago.

A Friday we in Christendom call Good Friday.

For those watching via live stream I pray, that today's Good Friday, message, will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I reflect on the thought that today is really not a day for words. For most of us, when we grieve, all words seem too much.

It is much better for us to just take in the facts about how Jesus was treated:-

- the injustice of the accusations and trial,
- the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders,
- and their narrow minded thinking and the positioning for power.

So, it is better that we just sit with that grief and blackness, and make a space inside of ourselves for the death of Jesus:-

We do this, every Good Friday, not because it leads quickly to the empty tomb on Sunday, but because Jesus did die. It is better that we not fill this day, with too many words. but instead, marvel at this death and consider our part in it.

A verse from that beautiful Hymn, 'How deep the fathers love for us', the lines,

*"Alas I hear my mocking voice cry out amongst the scoffers"
It was my sin that held him there!*

Speaks volumes to me about Jesus's sacrifice for me.

Today, in our reading of the Passion story from St John's Gospel, we're not spared any detail.

May I encourage us now to look at the scene, when Pilate asks the chief priests if he shall crucify their king, and to reflect upon their response, and how powerful a message it still is today for us on the topic of Idolatry!

It is the passage when the priest's answer to Pilate is:- *"We have no king but the emperor."*

Here we see that these leaders have no misgivings in violating their very identities to get what they want. The priests are telling the Empire, represented in Pilate, that their only king is Caesar the Roman emperor.

The Old Testament tells us that this is in direct violation of God's explicit dislike of kings. Over a thousand years earlier to this scene, the people of Israel had asked God for kings so that they can be like the other people in the region.

And God responded warning them then that kings would take their sons for soldiers, tax them to death, and all the other things that come with human kings.

God's desire was that he would be their king. That is what would have distinguished them from the other peoples in the region.

However, as the book of Samuel tells us, when the people persisted, God allowed kings to rise among the Israelites, provided they carried God's anointing.

Today, in this passage from St John, these priests are denying God's choice for a king, Jesus, and they are putting their faith in the Roman Emperor so that they can make the political alliance necessary for the death of their enemy, Jesus.

Along with their political posturing, is the fact that since the chief priests have allied themselves with the Emperor for their peace and security, they have now replaced God with the Emperor.

And when they did this, that's idolatry!

- Idolatry is when a created thing is put in place of the uncreated source of life and love.
- Idolatry is when we find our security, our power, our identity in anything other than God.
- Hence, the priests have committed the sin of idolatry.

We all recognize that idolatry is the most pervasive and insidious of sins.

If Good Friday teaches us anything, it is that maybe our understanding of what God is and can do, need to be cast down like the idols they are.

In the life of the spirit, the casting down of personal idols usually follows a pattern.

A possible list of these idols could be:-

- The first idol that needs casting down is the idol of things:- thinking that the things that surround us make us a worthy person. We are not our things, our things don't give us worth. Only God gives us worth. *That's why God is worshipped and things are not.*
- The next idol that needs casting down is the ego. We are not that great. We are also not all that bad either. Self-deprecation, too, is an activity of the ego. The ego, not the healthy bit that makes us a person, but the ego that manipulates people, things, and acts for our own purposes. This idol must come down.
- The next idols that need destruction are within the particular confines of the Abrahamic faiths.
- The first of these idols is the idolatry of faith. *The idolatry of faith is when we begin to use the story and beliefs of God to judge and separate others.* This is when "we carve in stone" the stories of our tradition, as reality to such a level, that we lose sight that they are a chronicle of people's encounters with the God of love and turn the activity of faith into the judgement seat of faith, separating those who are in and those who are out.
- This idolatry of faith is broken by true faith, which is *trust*, trust the stories and traditions about God, they are not God themselves, but instead they urge us into truth faith, pointing to God.
- The next idol does not have a hold on everyone, but it is still a powerful idol. And this is the idol of doubt. This idol tells us that only doubt and suspicion of the stories of God can bring us closer to the true God. It is an idol that says, "If you would simply think like I think about God, then you will understand the truth."

We need reminding that none of us possess the full knowledge of the unknowable God, and yes some beliefs should be doubted, but when doubt becomes the enemy of faith, instead of its steward, then it has become an idol.

So, our final idol that needs to come down is the hardest one of all, but it is the one that Good Friday most explicitly addresses, and that is the idolatry of God.

The idolatry of God means that *we have set ideas of exactly what God is and what God can do.*

If we were to use an everyday word for the idolatry of God, it would be our expectations:- i.e high expectations, or low expectations, horrible expectations, impossible expectations, immature expectations.

When we destroy that idol of God we will then truly live by faith; an exciting fully living faith, as one moment unfolds from the last, trusting that God is with us in love, no matter what happens.

Good Friday, with the death of Jesus, is an enactment of the death of all idols.

God does not die. Messiahs do not die. Yet, Jesus does die, and in the death of Jesus, we are released from all idols and left with the present moment in Christ, redeemed and free.

It is appropriate that we commemorate the death of all idols as we do today.

Let us all abide in stillness over the death of all our '*graspings*' for anything other than God.

Let our idols fall at the foot of the cross and sit awhile in death and grief, and wait.

Wait, because God has a surprise in store for all our lives.

Lord of the meek and the humble, help us to hate a life of earthly wealth and pleasure, and train our eyes on our servant God on the cross. Amen.