

Good Friday Year A 2026

My grandmother gave me a cross when I was in the eighth grade, and I wore it to school one day. One of my classmates asked me the question: If Jesus had been executed by the electric chair, would you wear a replica of that around your neck. I told my mother about it, and she brushed it off as just a ridiculous question. I didn't wear the cross again; I kept it in my desk drawer.... Took it off to college with me... I have no idea where it is now. But still, I mean... it is a good question.

We've just now heard John's account of Jesus' trial and crucifixion...and there's not much left to say...the narrative speaks for itself...heading inevitably to the cross, the principal symbol of our faith that has endured since its beginning....If you were to go to the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem which was built in the fourth century, and arguably very close to the actual site where Jesus was crucified...you can see etched all over the stone walls of the interior simple crosses, and within their quadrants, smaller crosses representing the number of family members making the pilgrimage there....that's where the Jerusalem cross comes from...One large cross with a smaller cross in each quadrant.

And though the cross has been venerated over the centuries it is, to say the least, an ambiguous symbol, a paradox...much like the lives we live; much like the faith we proclaim. It seems that truth best reveals itself in paradox, in mystery, in imaginative nuance... of our peripheral vision... On the one hand according to John's Gospel, Jesus on the cross represents God's solidarity with us in our suffering. For John, Jesus and God, the Creator are one and the same, and Jesus, though divine, is the archetype for all of humanity whose vocation it is to bear God's life to the world....so God could well say to us, if God were to speak, that I am not aloof from human suffering...I know it well...And I suffer with you.... Carl Jung called this divine solidarity God's answer to Job... not an answer to why suffering, but that God suffers with us....As the body of humankind is wounded, then so is the body of God wounded....

But on the other hand, the shadow side of the paradox, the cross is a blatant symbol of evil in the world...a symbol of capricious and corrupted power that rules and controls by fear and violence. It is an instrument of torture and death and shame...like the electric chair....and the violence of our world takes its toll on the innocent and guilty alike... But I want to say that the cross is more about shame than it is about death... Death is natural; we are mortal; the body knows how to die... but shame is another matter; it is not natural, and shame will destroy the human from the inside out....So, the cross is a symbol of solidarity, while at the

same time, a symbol of that which we stand against....You've heard the atonement theology so pervasive in western Christianity, especially on Good Friday... that Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for the sins of all humanity... That God orchestrated the torture and death of his Son to pay the ransom for human wretchedness...What kind of God would require such a thing, if indeed our God is a God of love...I want to say that Jesus didn't die for us... Jesus lived wholeheartedly for us...so whole heartedly that he ran afoul of the powers that be, ran afoul of institutional Power's obsessive self-interest, which will resist at all costs, change, renewal, and transformation...because such power is held by just a few to the disadvantage of the many....Jesus and the those who followed him sought to call out such a system... The Jesus movement stands for Love, and stands against the evil of the system....and Jesus and many of the those who followed were crushed by it...as so many are crushed by the system still. The powers that be will seek to crush the unrelenting power of Love... That is what Good Friday is about.... Good people, please never make the mistake of thinking that Jesus is the only crucified one... the crucified are still with us... every day in our world there is the shame and violence of crucifixion... in the streets of Minneapolis, in the rubble of Gaza, In the West Bank of Israel, in the meadows of Ukraine, in the innocent hills of Iran, in our prisons, in the housing projects of Mobile. And the

problem is, as it's always been.... corrupted power. If we learn anything from our present political reality in our own nation, it is that.

Back in the day, my mother would come to Girard Elementary and take my brothers and me out of school to go to church on Good Friday... and then I'd have to explain to my South Alabama Baptist classmates what Good Friday was. My mother said it was like going to a funeral... and I reckon that's right... A funeral for the world's innocent; a funeral for all victims of violence and shame; a funeral for the collateral damage of evil. Dare we, brothers and sisters, stand at the grave and make our song? Dare we choose to stand with our brother Jesus for the cause of goodness and justice?

This evil of which I speak, and to which the cross refers, is structural, that is, it is woven into the socio-economic and political fabric of our world; it pervades our institutions, our public policies....It slips into position insidiously, often unseen...but evil never happens by accident...It is always a choice.... And we good people have been given the gift of choosing. I say, that in a world of Good Fridays, a world of unending crucifixions, we choose Love... Our enemy is not the hate that surrounds us, but indifference. Call on the compassionate Spirit that lives and moves among us... that we may stand in the face of the world's ruin... but we stand in the promise that death is not the end, that life is forever possible... that is why we can make the audacious claim that this Friday is good.

