

“Two great mysteries” (Good Friday)

Based on John 18:1 – 19:42.

Good Friday. The day when the earth shook. The day when the rocks split. The day when the Sun went dark. The day when the tombs were open. The day when our sins, mine and yours, nailed the Son of God, Jesus Christ to the cross.

The day when the One through whom everything was created, laid down His life and suffered death for His dearly beloved human creatures. The day that changed everything. The day when through the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, peace was made between God and His entire creation.

We call it Good Friday. For it was good for us. It is good for us. On that day through His own death God brought us the gift of life. The most precious of all gifts. True life. Eternal life. In presence of our Creator and Redeemer.

That is what we remember on Good Friday. What do you think about this event? Is it easy to understand? Is it hard? I guess it is both. It is easy when the Holy Spirit dwells with us, opens our hearts and minds and enlightens us.

But it can be very hard as well. Those realities probably are impossible to comprehend without the help of the Holy Spirit. Especially some parts of our Christian message. Especially the most important parts of our message.

We heard today John's account on the last hours of Jesus' life. And it helps us to understand better two of the greatest mysteries revealed to us. Or we can say two of the central teaching of the Bible. What are they? First, the truth about us, about our sin, and second – the truth about God's grace.

There is an interesting connection between these two. They are indeed inseparable. We can't understand one without the other. We can't understand our sin without seeing how great the cost to deal with it was.

And there is no way we can understand how incredible God's grace is unless we understand the depth of our sin first. That's how it works, better understanding of one of these realities helps us to see clearer the other. And if we don't understand one, our sin, we can't understand or desire the other – God's grace.

This account of the last hours in Jesus' life helps us to reflect on both, on our sin and on God's grace and hopefully to grow both in our awareness of just how serious our sin is, and in appreciating of our God's undeserved attitude toward us.

The evening before the Good Friday. Where was Jesus? In the garden of Gethsemane. What was He doing? He was praying. And He plead His disciples to pray as well. As we know, they ... fell asleep.

What was Jesus praying for? He was begging His Father: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...” (Mat 26:39) “Abba, Father, all things are

possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will". (Mark 14:36) "And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:43-44)

Jesus had known the whole time why He had come in human flesh. He was, as the Revelation says, the Lamb that was killed before the foundation of the world. He was born with this one purpose.

His whole life had been leading up to this moment. When He would reveal God's grace towards humanity in the most incredible act of self-sacrificial love, taking our place, receiving our death.

He had had some time to prepare for what would happen during the next several hours. And still... Jesus was in agony, asking the Father whether there was another way. "Father, please!" But there was no other way.

We struggle to comprehend our sin and how serious it is. We can of course see the terrifying examples of cold-blooded mass murders and other expressions of pure evil. Recent reports from Ukraine paint rather bleak a picture. But we still struggle to believe that we all, every human being carries this evil potential in our hearts.

"It's them, those evil doers and sociopaths, not us..." But Jesus' body hanging on the cross tells a different story. He was handed over for our sin. For mine and yours. Those were people just like us who cried out: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Those were people just like us who beat Jesus and mocked Him, who turned away from Him even as they knew He was innocent.

We may not feel our sinfulness. At least not fully. But the cross of Jesus is the most power reminder ... for so serious is our sin, that there was no other way to make peace in heaven and on earth, but through the blood of God's own Son.

Now, once we begin to recognize that we are the problem, that it was our sin – mine and yours, that murdered Jesus, we may begin to see the incredible love and grace of our God. We may only begin... we can't possibly comprehend it.

He knew what we carry inside our hearts. He knew that there was nothing good in us, but still our God would not let us perish in our sin, He would not let us to receive what we justly deserve, death and eternal separation from Him and from everything good that He brings to us.

How could this all-knowing holy God not destroy us? What kind of love is that which made Him to come to us – who were His enemies – and to lay down His life for those who abandoned Him, rejected Him, mocked Him, crucified Him?!

How could Jesus voluntarily give Himself into the hands of that violent and spiteful crowd? And this is exactly what He did. He wasn't captured and taken as a prisoner. Not at all. John, who was present there, gives us the shocking details of that

evening. When Judas came, accompanied with a cohort of armed soldiers, that is with at least a hundred heavily armed men, Jesus went to meet them. He asked them this simple question: “Who are you looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth”, was the answer. “I am He.” A few little words. “Ego eimi” (in Greek). And remember what happened? All the big and scary crowd, all these rough men, hardened and toughened in battlefields, when they heard Jesus’ voice saying “I am He”, they all drew back and fell on the ground.

They could not even stand in Jesus’ presence. They could do nothing to Him. They didn’t capture Jesus – He gave Himself into their hands. Even as He knew what will follow. Rude interrogation. False accusations heaped up.

Physical intimidation. Painful, painful beatings. Abandonment. By those in power. By those who were supposed to stand for justice. But, also cowardice of His closest friend and the most faithful followers.

Finally, the crucifixion. Indescribable agony on the cross, while hearing the mocking remarks by those whom He had come to save. Love... Grace... These words fall short to describe the attitude of God towards us that we see in Jesus.

We can’t fully understand what happened on that day. We can’t fully understand what exactly God did on that day and how He did it. That remains for us a mystery. For now. But what we can know and what we should know and marvel about and cherish – is what God Himself reveals us about this event.

He says and He wants everyone to know it, that He did it because of His love for ... you. For each one of you. For every human being. He says and He wants us to know, that on that cross Jesus Christ took away all our sins, all your sins, all my sins, all our shame, failures, guilt. He took them all upon Himself.

He says and He wants us to know that now Jesus’ pierced hand offers to us the fruits of His death, that is, – the forgiveness of all our sins, freedom from sin and idols, freedom from the fear of death, protection against the devil and his minions, restored relationships with our Creator, with our Father in heaven, adoption in God’s family, and eternal life in New Heavens and New Earth.

That is what resurrected and ever-living Jesus desires to give you. What do we need to do? What could we possibly do to receive such incredible gifts? Here is Jesus’ answer for you. In His last words. “It is finished!”

Meaning, Jesus has done everything so that you could receive His gifts ... as gifts. Unmerited, undeserved... infinitely precious gifts of our God. Gifts that were bought paying the ultimate price of Jesus’ sufferings and death.

Now they are yours... and if you accept those gifts, then you are His. Then you belong to Jesus. Then you are united with Him forever. Then this divine love of which we now can only experience a glimpse will be poured over you, so

abundantly, so intensely, so overwhelmingly that you will forget about everything else. For that will be the same Jesus who will meet you when you finish your race.

That will be the same loving and gracious Jesus who will step forward to greet you. He will say to you "I am He" ... and we won't need to fall on ground out of fear, for He will embrace us as His brothers and sisters.

That's what Good Friday reminds us. Two of the greatest mysteries. Our sin and God grace that has taken it all away. It also reminds that the Day is coming when the earth will be shaken once again, one more time, the Day when the coming age will dawn and when the Lamb who was killed, will begin His reign among us never to end it.

Then one of these two mysteries, our sin, will remain only in past, and the other, the love and grace of God, will become our present. Forever.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Amen.