

Good Friday SML 2018
Specifically JN 19:30

“It is finished.”

Here, “It is finished” should be taken in the sense that – it is completed, it is fulfilled, it is perfected, which is so much more than, “It is over.” After some terrible ordeal, we might say, “That’s over with,” in that, it is in the past and now we can get on with life. But “It is finished” . . . “It is finished” is quite the opposite.

To the unbeliever, or even to the cynical, it appears that “it is finished” means “He” is finished. By any ordinary measure, this is not completion, this is not fulfillment, but failure. It is death. It is the end of all those grand hopes He had proposed. He started out announcing the coming of the kingdom of God and He ends up here. Some kingdom. Some king. The jeering crowds before the cross are having the last word. He talked so splendidly:

- ✓ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ✓ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- ✓ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

What kingdom? What comfort? What inheritance? The time has come to face the facts: He is finished, and whatever “it is” is over.

It is finished, but time goes on. So it is not over. At least it not over yet. It is finished, in that, nothing can happen now to undo it. Now there is absolutely nothing to fear because the worst has already happened. On a certain Good Friday afternoon, it could truly be said, “God is dead,” and there is no catastrophe greater than the death of Almighty God.

If we say that “It is finished” means that the story is ended, then why wasn’t the drama wrapped up then and there that first Good Friday at the Place of the Skull? What is God waiting for? What has He been waiting for - for two thousand years? Why are we here, never mind those who may be here two thousand years from now?

It is obvious that “It is finished” does not mean that suffering, sorrow, loss and sin are things of the past. “It is finished” means that suffering, sorrow, loss and sin do not have the last word. It means that God has the last word. For if suffering, sorrow, loss and sin had the last word, then suffering, sorrow, loss and sin would be able to separate us from God. What is definitely finished is the power of division to

divide. What is definitely finished is the power of separation to separate us from God. That is what “is finished.”

In the Catholic Church, the Good Friday Commemoration of the Lord’s Passion includes the Veneration of the Cross. Beginning at the back of the Church and slowly moving toward the front, I will elevate the crucifix, and gradually unveil it as I sing three times, “Behold the wood of the cross, on which is hung our salvation.” You will respond by singing, “O Come, let us adore.” Then, one by one, everyone in the congregation will come forward to kiss the feet of the dead Christ. This is one of the most moving moments in the Commemoration, but it is not necessarily loved by all. Some think it is morbid. Others even think it is idolatry.

Seventeenth century Jesuits in Nagasacki and their converts could have avoided their own crucifixion by stepping on the crucifix. “It is such a little thing to require,” their tormenters said, and so apostates came to agree. But those who became martyrs knew that the little thing was everything. It was the absolute antithesis of Good Friday’s veneration. Contempt or Veneration is absolute, because the reality signified by the cross is, in the words of the creed, “God from

God, Light from Light, true God from true God.” And so we kiss the cross.

Yet we would do well to hesitate, remembering the one to whom He said in the garden, “Would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” By false veneration, by just going through the motions, He is betrayed again and again and again. So let today’s kiss mean something. Let today’s kiss say, “Lord, I am so sorry!”

Here He is on Good Friday, taking away the sins of the world by bearing the sins of the world, bearing also the consequences of the sins of the world. And here we are, at the foot of the Cross, acknowledging that we are implicated in the mystery of sin and redemption. For our sins are included in the sins of the world. We are participants as well. Through our suffering, sorrow, loss and sin, we kneel and kiss the feet of the dead Christ in Whose death we acknowledge our part, and say, “Lord, I am so sorry!”

In the veneration of the Cross, three truths come to the fore. First, we are implicated, deeply implicated. We just read the Passion and the entire congregation joined in crying out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” It is not what they did. Jesus is nailed to the cross not only by the sinful decisions and actions

of first century Rome and Palestine. Jesus is nailed to the cross by what we did, and what we continue to do, in twenty-first century Medford.

Second, and despite it all, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God. And if we lose hold of that truth, then “it IS finished,” but not in the way I have been describing.

And third, and this is the inconsistency at the heart of it all, God’s loss is everything on the cross, His taking our place, is our only hope that suffering, sorrow, loss and sin are not things of the past, but that “It is finished” means that suffering, sorrow, loss and sin do not have the last word. It means that God has the last word. For if He didn’t, then suffering, sorrow, loss and sin would be able to separate us from God.

St. Paul worded it best:

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (RMNS 8:35)

No. What is definitely finished is the power of suffering, sorrow, loss and sin to divide, the power of suffering, sorrow, loss and sin to separate us from God. That is what “is finished.”