

THE PASSION OF THE LORD – GOOD FRIDAY – YEAR A

On this day, almost 2000 years ago, so common place were crucifixions under Roman occupation, that passers-by would have barely raised an eyebrow at the events of that first Good Friday.

Like his birth, the Saviour's Passion, lacked all of the sensational character of a Hollywood blockbuster, a 'Lord of the Rings,' a 'Star Wars,' or a 'Harry Potter.' Despite its lack of spectacle however, this was the real-life encounter on which all such tales are based.

It was on this day that the forces of good, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and the forces of evil, fought the decisive battle for the soul of the human race.

On this day, Jesus, like David of old, fought singlehandedly against his Goliath, the enemy of his people - the spirit of evil made manifest in the power of sin and death. Our sin had sought to destroy Jesus. Our sin sought to crush him with suffering, with sear and with hopelessness.

In union with Judas, it was our sin that betrayed Jesus.

In union with the Apostles, it was our sin that abandoned and denied him.

In union with the religious authorities, it was our sin that bound and derided him.

In union with the crowd, it was our sin that cried out – "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

And, in union with the Romans, it was our sin that stripped and scourged him. Our sin that mocked him, that crowned his sacred head with thorns and struck him with a reed. And, it was our sin that nailed his sacred body to the cross.

Jesus however, "Having loved his own who were in the world ... loved them to the end." (John 13:1) Like a lamb to slaughter, he absorbed all of the hatred our sin could muster and, as only the Son of God could, he vanquished it with his love. "Father forgive them (he implored) for they know not what they do!" (Luke 23:34)

Jesus, our eternal high priest, offered himself to the merciful Father as, "the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and ... for the sins of the whole world," (1 John 2:2); and it was only when he had consumed the last dregs of our sin-fuelled hate, that he offered up his spirit, proclaiming with his dying breath, "It is accomplished."

It was at this point that Jesus, having crushed the head of the serpent, now entered into the final decisive battle with death itself. Jesus, knowing that the Father would never abandon him, "... to the realm of the dead," nor let his, "faithful one see decay," (Psalm 16:10), entered willingly into the seeming finality of death itself.

It is this reason therefore that we can rejoice with St. Paul, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness," (Heb 4:15-16), knowing that, "... it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:19-20)