

Good Friday Chief Service

19 April, Anno Domini 2019

St. John 18-19

Pr. Kurt Ulmer (adapted from Pr. Hemmer's "A God Who Bleeds, A God Who Dies")

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Behold the man on the cross! This is His purpose. This is why God is man. This is why the eternal Second Person of the triune God has taken human flesh. This is the reason. Behold the man on the cross, bleeding, gasping for every breath, suffering, giving up His Spirit, dying.

Behold the man! Behold His hands, which the night before were washing His disciples' feet. Now they are pinned with nails to the rough crossbeam of this instrument of torture and execution. Behold the hands that scooped Adam out of the dirt but are now stained with blood and dirt. Behold the fingers with which He touched lepers, opened the ears of a deaf man, and picked up bread to declare it to be His body. Now they quiver and jerk uncontrollably every time He has to pull Himself up on the nails through His wrists to take a breath. This is why God has hands.

Behold the man! Behold His skin that has been shredded with the Roman *flagrum*, with lacerating bone shards and bruising steel balls woven into the leather thongs to inflict the most damage to the skin and the greatest suffering on the one being beaten. Behold the skin of His back, which is now a bloody pulp that He must now scrape up and down on the cross as He struggles to breathe. But this is why God has skin. Behold the knees skinned and bruised from falling under the weight of the cross He was for a time forced to carry out to this Place of the Skull. This is why God has legs.

Behold the man! Behold His feet, nailed to the cross, bearing His weight as He dies. Behold the feet that walked from town to town as He taught His disciples, healed the sick, and preached the good news of man's release from captivity to sin and death. Behold the feet that Mary anointed with a pound of expensive ointment, washed with her tears, and wiped with her hair. Behold the feet that are now bound in place. Behold the feet that must endure stabbing pain as they push up on the nail pinning them in place. Behold His heel, which in this act of dying is crushing the

head of the serpent, destroying the kingdom of Satan, answering for mankind's sinful rebellion. This is why God has feet.

Behold the man! Behold His head, with the rivulets of blood flowing from each place one of the thorns on this mock crown has pressed through His skin. Behold the head that should rightly be crowned with majesty and glory surpassing every earthly king's crown. Behold the head over which has been hung the sign listing the charge that brought this death sentence: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Behold the head that, like His forefather David's, would have been anointed to make Him King. This is why God has a head.

Behold the man! Behold His face, which has fresh swelling and bruising from the blows dealt first by the High Priest's officer and later by the soldiers, jeering at Him to "Prophecy! Who is it that struck You?" Behold His eyes, which in the beginning looked at all He had made, seeing that it was "very good." Behold the eyes that looked with mercy and compassion on the crowds, on His disciples, on the sick; eyes that wept over death and unbelieving Jerusalem. Behold His lips, which spoke words of absolution but are now dry and cracked from a deeper thirst than you will ever know - thirst for a single drop of God's mercy but tasting none. Behold the cheeks that were kissed by His mother. Behold how His face contorts in agony. This is why God has a face.

Behold the man! Behold His lungs as they slowly fill with fluid. Behold the breath which once breathed life into Adam's nostrils. Behold the lungs that in this hanging posture cannot exhale without the man pulling His whole body up on the nails to open His airway. Behold the lungs that expel one final breath as He cries, "It is finished," gives up His spirit, and dies. This is why God has lungs.

Behold the man! Behold His bones, which remain unbroken throughout this tortuous ordeal. Behold the reason every sacrifice, every Passover lamb, every bull for the whole burnt offering, every scapegoat, every ram, every turtledove had to be healthy and intact, with no broken bones or disfigurement, a perfect specimen of its kind. Behold the soldiers, who, with their clubs, shatter the legs of each of the thieves crucified with Jesus but refrain from doing the same to Jesus. This is why God has bones.

Behold the man! Behold His side, into which the soldier thrust his spear, causing a river of blood and water to pour forth, confirming that He is truly and completely dead. His heart has stopped. His synapses no longer fire. Behold the deep sleep of death that has come upon this man on the sixth day of the week.

Behold the material from the side of the crucified man that God will fashion into His Bride, the Church, and give her to Him when He wakes. Behold the side of the man, which unbelieving Thomas will be invited to shove his rude hand into. This is why God has a side.

Behold the man! Behold His blood, which pours from His lifeless body, staining the wooden beams of the cross, spilling onto the dirt, reddening the soil, watering His creation. Behold the blood that He first shed when He was an eight-day-old boy, undergoing the sign by which all Jewish boys were made Israelites. Behold the blood for which the crowd thirsted and ironically asked for exactly as they needed, “His blood be on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:25). Behold the blood that was foreshadowed on every Day of Atonement when the blood of the sacrifice was splattered on the mercy seat, on the altar, and on the people. Behold the blood He gave to His disciples in the cup the night before, telling them its purpose: shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Behold the blood that proves that this God was also truly and fully man, a Brother in blood to us sinners. This is the blood by which this eternal High Priest enters once for all into the Most Holy Place, giving sinful men access to a holy God. This is why God has blood.

This is no accident. Nor is it a tragedy. Jesus Himself had said, “No one takes it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18). This is why God is man: not to teach you how to be good, not to show you the right way to live, not to set a perfect example, not to impart His wise teaching. God is man so that He can die for men. He has a life so that He can lay it down in exchange for yours. Behold the man!

In the Name of +Jesus.