

It's a good thing when justice is served. Too often the guilty try and squirm out of their punishment, a little boy protesting, saying his younger brother begged him to push him on a sled down the stairs—he didn't mean to break his arm!; a CEO claiming weak loopholes to justify his decades of secret bonuses; a spouse digging up their loved one's past mistakes "but remember that time when you..." to try get a free pass for their guilt this time. We sinners try to get out of our own "mistakes" and "accidents" all the time, so when justice is served, and sin is called sin, it's a blessing that curbs some of the chaos and evil in our world. When a criminal is put behind bars, we feel safer. When one company is condemned for price-fixing, we relax because the others won't overcharge for bread. When we see the right man serving time, when the punishment fits the crime, the rest of the world sits back in relief for a while.

On this Good Friday, this is the pleasure of nearly everyone around the Christ. They had got Him. The political elite were glad that this grassroots leader was dying because of the trouble He was causing, because of His apparent opposition to the Roman rule, because He claimed to be a king. The rebels in the crowd were glad Jesus was up there bleeding because He didn't renounce the Herods and rulers like He ought to, and He deserves to die for not fighting for Jewish independence. The Pharisees were glad He was hanging before the world because He healed on the Sabbath and allowed His disciples to do work on that sacred day; He deserved this, they said, because He refused to condemn the outcast, despicable sinners, and certainly because He made Himself, He made Himself equal to God. This man's blasphemy has earned Him death; the Levitical Laws demanded it.

And everyone else, going along with their leaders, thought this man was worthy of death because look at Him, He must have been lying to us all. If He could heal others, if He could save others, then save yourself and prove it or shut up and die.

Though they had pled Hosanna, save us, days before when they thought He would bring about independence and redemption, the crowd was now pleased that their cry of crucify was answered. Each for their own reason saw the God in heaven as bringing justice on this awful man. Good riddance.

Each nail driven into His flesh, each thorn pressed into His brow, each blow and whip from the soldiers was justice served.

I've never seen the Passion of the Christ. Last year Becky and I tried to watch it, and it was remarkable, the emotion they captured and the story they portrayed. But we couldn't finish it. It was too much to stomach, the whipping and the agony, and that of an innocent man, and then to know that the actor was depicting Christ our Lord, that this was a picture of what really happened to our saviour, as I said, we couldn't finish.

The injustice that we Christians read when we go through the Passion accounts, that that movie depicted, and the justice that the world around Jesus saw, all of it led to complete and utter agony. Not even the toughest person could withstand what Christ went through. The physical torture, from slaps to whips to the thorns to the nails, to hanging by just your hands and feet gasping for breath, it's beyond comprehension for us.

Yet the physical suffering was just the beginning of it.

Our readings today make it clear that God in heaven did not leave it solely to Pilate and the council and the soldiers to punish Christ. The Father above was ensuring that the rightful wrath was delivered in full. Darkness consumes the world as the Sun ceases to shine. This is no coincidental solar eclipse, but a fulfillment of what we heard from Psalm 88. Darkness has become Christ's only companion. All those who might have some compassion on Christ, they stand afar as He is enveloped with darkness, that darkness without and the darkness within. And Jesus is faithful to pray, persistent to cry to God His Father until His last breath and yet as the psalmist wrote, God in heaven remembers Him no more, He cuts off His loving hand and His gracious face from this man suffering on the cross. What's

more is that Jesus knows He is utterly alone, cut off even from God, as in Matthew and Mark's account He cries out Psalm 22's "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" More excruciating than the cat-of-nine-tails flaying His back, more repulsive than sour wine vinegar pressed to His cracked and bleeding lips, to be cast away from God's presence is to experience hell. So as Isaiah prophesied, that He was marred beyond human semblance, so much that people hid their faces from Him, they turned away because of His gruesome state, but also because this man, gasping for breath, was receiving the entirety of God's wrath, something that we can't imagine, let alone can we bear seeing it with our own eyes.

"Do you not fear God? Since you and I are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for this is the due reward for our deeds." This is not something we like to admit. It's something we can hardly understand. We like to justify our sins by calling them "mistakes" or "accidents" or "missing the mark." I only acted this way because they did that. It's a result of how I was treated by my parents. I didn't realize it was hurting anyone. And while all those may describe or explain our sin to some degree, they downplay the reality of what we have done and what we deserve. For our sin, our selfishness, for our neglect of our neighbours as we live out our self-indulgent behaviours, for our disregard, our disdain for our God, for our creator, we have earned God's loving face and gracious hands turning away from us, the wrath of God pouring out on us, and darkness, eternal darkness consuming us.

"But this man, this man has done nothing wrong." That thief on the cross spoke truer words than He knew. For not only was Christ innocent of all the council and pharisees accused Him of and charged Him with, He was innocent of all sin before man and before God. He alone lived a righteous life, He alone deserved the favour of God, the ear of God, the praise of God.

And yet this unblemished man went to the cross that He would be the Lamb of God, dying for the sins of all. This lamb doesn't merely pay for my sins and yours, He doesn't just cover the bill like a parent paying to fix a child's baseball through a window accident, but He makes them His own that the

wrath of God would be poured out on the true culprit. Surely “He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,” “He was wounded for our transgressions,” in fact “the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. “

Christ has made His own your hurtful words to your spouse, your wasted time at work, your gossip about your government and your parents and your friends. He has made these His own, but not only your actions but also your sinful heart from which these actions so freely flow. He has made your selfishness His, that root which causes you to lust and covet and neglect and hate in your heart.

So with all your sin firmly borne on His shoulders, with all your wickedness etched into His heart, “it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief,” “upon Him was the chastisement, the stripes” and “with this offering for your guilt you are brought peace;” “you are healed.” With the wrath of God on Christ, with Jesus made one cut-off and laid with the slain, with your sins sealed in the tomb with Him, justice is served. Your sin has been stolen from you and paid for.

Only look upon Christ and see His suffering; see the gravity, the horrors of your sin and what you deserve, and see the purity, the depth, the beauty of One who loved you enough to bear your punishment in your place, to be cut-off and crushed that you would never be.

Amen.