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On Death and Dying With Christ: A Homily for Good Friday

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On Death and Dying With Christ: A Homily for Good Friday

Christ died our death so that we might die his death. Such is the meaning and message of today's liturgy.

In death one's humanity and mortality are revealed most clearly. And so it was with Christ. Christ died our death because Christ was human like us: "was tempted in every way that we are," scripture says, and death is the greatest temptation.

But these passages and this liturgy are so familiar to us that it is difficult for us to experience their power. Perhaps the insights of a contemporary of ours, Dr. Kubler-Ross, can help us understand better how Christ's death was a dying our death.

Those who have read her works or who have spent long hours nursing the sick and the dying will have noted the phenomenon. From an initial disbelief and rebellion we move through a bargaining stage to a time of depression ending finally and usually in acceptance. If this is the human pattern then Christ too experienced the sequence.

It is clear from scripture that this was the case. His initial reaction to the awareness of impending death was one of shock and rebellion: "he began to be greatly distressed and troubled."

Following this he moved into a bargaining phase: "if it be pos-

sible Father remove this cup from me."

Yet even at this stage there was the beginning of acceptance: "yet not my will but yours be done." This fact of the meshing of stages is common and not simply an exception.

It is during the crucifixion that we see most clearly the depression stage. To this there are two aspects. First there is a breaking with past relationships. In the Gospel of today we see this poignantly symbolized by his giving of Mary into the care of the disciple John. Furthermore, he sums up his life with the words: "It is accomplished." Secondly, we note a real depression revealed by his cry: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me."

And finally there was acceptance in the fullest sense: "into your hands I commend my Spirit." With these words he abandoned his life and purpose into the caring hands of his Father.

This is the way Christ died. And this is the way — mostly in less dramatic forms — that we all must die. But for the Christian something has changed.

Because Christ died our death we can now die his death — a redeeming death. This begins in Baptism whose symbolism is death oriented as well as life giving. It continues in our daily dy-

ing as we play our part in the redemptive action in Christ's body the Church. And finally our death too is redemptive in Christ. We too can now be obedient even unto death because of the grace of God in Christ.

And let us not forget that the Eucharist also links us with the death of Christ. As yesterday's epistle proclaims: Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we are proclaiming his death until he comes.

And so it is appropriate that on this day when we celebrate the saving death of Jesus Christ that we receive his body.

In doing so we recall the past

— we perform a memorial. We are also linked with his saving activity now, and mystically participate and anticipate our actual dying with Christ. For the words, "until the Lord comes" mean not only in the final in-gathering of us all into the kingdom, but his coming to us when we die with him in each of our deaths.

So let us continue with our liturgy recalling these mysteries which will take a life-time and a death-time to fully comprehend.

Today let us die with Christ.

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