

## Good Friday Homily

### Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
*Amen.*

...and He said to her, "Woman, behold, your son..."

From the foot of the cross, His mother stood, gazing upon her broken son. She recalled memories of His infancy, childhood, and His coming of age, as scattered images flashed within her mind. This woman standing before Him, had chosen to suffer for His birth, and to give up much that He might live – repeatedly choosing His life over hers. Having suspended her disbelief, and listened to God's call, she had born a *very special* son. This mother who had raised Him, with love and compassion, who had protected Him from the evils of this world – had reached a day, like all mothers do, when it was time to let her child go into that world.

But, how could *this* have happened, how could *this* be their stories end? After everything good which He had given, this felt like much more *than she* was willing to give.

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As I reflect on the Gospel of Christ's passion this year, I have been struck by the image of Mary, standing at the foot of the cross. Traditionally on this day we think of Christ's sacrifice *for us*, but I have found myself caught in reflection about Mary's sacrifice *for Jesus*.

The notion of sacrifice, in *our* culture, is one that we have learned to resist being drawn into. Having just journeyed through the penitential season of Lent, many of us have become increasingly

aware of how much we have conditioned ourselves, to avoid, being inconvenienced.

We don't want to go without, and we want to believe we can have it all – for *sacrifice* causes pain.

Yet in the context of Christ, in this Good Friday story, the pinnacle of love and adoration, *which we glorify*, occurs through *the sacrifice* that is made.

But it is in the midst of a culture afraid of sacrifice and pain, where we find a constant, which *has always*, and *will always* be. Just like Mary, at the foot of the cross, *all mothers*, who bear children, *choose sacrifice* as an expression of love.

Throughout *all* pregnancies, in *every* generation, on *each* part of the globe, mothers sacrifice health, comfort *and* their bodies, so that they might deliver life, into this world.

We tend not to think of it, with our modern medical assurances, but mothers also risk their lives, by carrying their children to term. No matter the circumstance, and no matter the family, a mother's blood *must* be shed, and a mother's pain *must* be endured, for *any* child to be born.

A mother's decision to give birth to life is to choose *sacrifice* as an expression of love.

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I was only five years old, the first time *I* ever opened *my* eyes to see sacrifice. I remember sitting at the dinner table with my struggling immigrant family – my parents and I, having only left Scotland for

Canada three years prior. I remember my Dad having to stay late at work that night, and my Mum having prepared a meal for my sister and me. I remember looking at my mother's plate, in comparison to sisters and mine, and realizing that we had much larger portions than she did.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't become aware that someone was going to starve, or that anyone was going to go entirely without, but from the innocent eyes of my five-year-old self, I became exceedingly aware that my mother was choosing her children over herself.

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As Jesus mother grieved the sacrifice of her son, standing at the foot of the cross, we too are forced, to think of what it would be like, to gaze upon the destruction of one of our own children. You might thrash and punch and strike to get near – risking everything you have, just to reach out, and assure them that you are here. You might shout to them – offering yourself in their place – you might fall to our knees, not knowing what to do next.

Aware of how much pain His mother had to be in, Jesus gazed back down upon Mary. Gathering all the energy He could, to offer her comfort and care, and looking to His beloved disciple, He uttered, "Woman, behold your Son." He knows His time is drawing near, and that His mother pains for His impending death – having given so much of her life, so that He might give His.

He knows that He can no longer *be* her earthly son, He knows that things are about to change, and so He reaches out to both His mother and His disciple, and He entrusts them to each other's care.

One might ask how this could possibly be enough, how no substitute could ever replace a child. But from the height of the cross, Jesus tells these two beloved, that by adopting one another, by assuming each other's care, he would not die on the cross before them – for his love would live again – in them.

It is through the joining of disciples such as these, that the Body of Christ came to be formed in our world. That through the death and despair of the cross on Good Friday, from the sacrifice which Jesus made, His loved ones would come to espouse one another, and would baptize *new family* in His name.

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As many of you know, my wife Heather and I are nearing the end of the process to adopt a child from South Africa. One of the hardest things for me personally, about this process, is acknowledging that in the midst of the joy and excitement surrounding the formation of our family – *is the sacrifice* of another.

For many reasons, under many circumstances, and in many places throughout the world, there are mothers who are unable to raise their children. Whether it is because of disease, poverty, young age, rape, or simply a lack of support – there are birthmothers in this world who choose *sacrificial love*.

These mothers have loved their children so much, that they have each chosen to carry their child to birth, and out of love, have chosen to offer them a life, which they cannot provide themselves. Sometimes a child is left on a hospital step, other times with a social worker, and often they are orphaned by death, but regardless of how or why, these birthmothers, embody the love from the cross.

Too often the notion of love gets twisted and confused in our world – mistaken with romance or lust, flirtation or butterflies, but a mother's love, the love of Mary, the love my own mother, the love of your mother, the love of birthmothers, and the love of adopted mothers, is a love, that *is not* confused.

Choosing *sacrifice* as an expression of love is genuine, true, and Christ-like love. It is a love that does not benefit the self, because it pours out the best one has to give, for the life of another.

The love from the cross is a sacrificial love; it is a love which cannot be separated by death or distance or pain. It is the love of a mother who feeds her children before herself; it is the love of a mother choosing her child's life over hers; it is the love of a mother at the foot of the cross, and it is the love of a God nailed above her.

From the cross of death to the cross to the glory, our Saviour proclaims aloud, "behold, your mothers... behold, your sons," take each other, and have life in my love.

Thanks be to God.