

In Celebration of Sorrow

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When was the last time you cheered for the villain – publicly – out loud? When have you ever hoped the bad guys would win? Have you ever been a big fan of injustice?

That's what Good Friday stirs up inside me. It's strange. It's like a one-of-a-kind day. It is as though the whole world celebrates sorrow, injustice, evil and villainy all at the same time. For once, bad is good. Justice is turned on its ear, and we take joy in the turn of events.

Good Friday is the epitome of irony, the ultimate oxymoron. For some, it is a time to remember those "Christ-killers," the Jews who cannibalized one of their own. It stirs up hate, the same kind of abominable hate that led Nazi Germany into a feeding frenzy, resulting in the incineration of six million Jews. For others, there is righteous indignation. "How could they?" which is akin to "I'd never have done that!" So why do we call it *Good Friday*? Why not *Bad Friday*? Is it wishful thinking? Does calling it good make it good, like some self-fulfilling prophecy? Is it like we have to make excuses for it, be apologetic? It seems overshadowed by Easter anyway. Maybe we should just forget it. Maybe we should ignore it – treat it like any other Friday. I think I could even learn to hate Good Friday. Who wants to celebrate sorrow? Who wants to hang around with mourners? Doesn't sound like much of a party to me...

I know the logical arguments of course. You can't celebrate the events of Easter without the prior events of the Friday before. There would be no resurrection if there were no death. The sequence of events is undeniable, but it's like we have to get this out of the way so we can get on with the real party.

But for me, Good Friday brings genuine sorrow, the kind of wholehearted sadness that deserves at least as much holy honor as Easter itself. Good Friday puts grief in the spotlight, the kind of wretched gloom that comes from understanding exactly how similar I am to Hitler himself; the kind that understands that each of us is just a thought, just a breath away from the most destructive behavior known to man. Our tools may not be weapons of mass destruction, but they are no less destructive. Our weapons of choice are the tongue, the power of our biases, the will to inflict what we define as justice – all the God-like qualities we can muster for our own advantage. Oh yes. There's plenty to be sorry for.

Maybe the difference for me is that I'm not afraid to face that kind of sorrow. I'm not ready to sweep it under the rug, to rush through the agony on the way to the glory of Easter. I don't fear the truth about myself anymore. I'm ready to face it head on, ready to acknowledge all the ugliness of my wretched condition. I'm ready to call sin what it is, to paint it in horrendous tones of gray, brown, bile green and – of course – black. When I look in the faces of those who crucified Christ, I see myself. I recognize the snarl on Herod's face, the grimy feel of shame on Pilate's hands. I can hear my voice among the chief priests and the crowd yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They knew what they were doing, and so do I.

What made the difference for me? Was it just the knowledge that Easter is only a few days away, and that Christ's resurrection makes up for all the bad stuff that happened on Good Friday? Was it the recognition that the end somehow justifies the means?

I realized how sin had invaded us. I recognized it in every pore, in every thought, in every breath.

In short, I had a small—no, a minuscule taste—of what the Man of Sorrows became intimately acquainted with.

Christ bore both human and divine agony... so He could say, "I hope you never do, and I'll make sure you never do."

Yes, it's that and more.

I've had a taste of sorrow – real sorrow – the kind that leaves a bitter aftertaste and that never goes away. When my seventeen-year-old daughter, my first-born, died instantly in a car accident, with only weather to blame, I got a taste of the wages of sin. I got a whole mouth-full, a face-full – much, much more than I could swallow. Her death wasn't the result of specific sin, but for the first time, I realized how sin has invaded us. I recognized it in every pore, in every thought, every breath. I saw the battle between good and evil in the raw, and realized what side we're all prone to be on. I felt the hot breath of Satan himself, and was shocked to see how close I had to be to him to feel it. I saw his randomness, his power, and his cruel snarl in my face. I went eye-to-eye with the Devil, and somehow lived to tell about it. In short, I had a small – no, a *minuscule* taste – of what the Man of Sorrows became intimately acquainted with. I know human agony, which is unimaginable to most. But it is nothing in comparison to *divine agony*.

When people hear of my tragedy, their frequent response is, "I can't imagine..." I usually reply with something like, "I hope you never do."

Ah, but that's the heart of Good Friday! Christ bore both human *and* divine agony. He endured the wretched burden of the sins of mankind for all time so He could say to each of us, "I hope you never do, and I'll make sure you never do."

Oh yeah! It's Good Friday all right. It's the Best Friday!