

Dear Friends,

On March 21, the First day of Spring, we will celebrate Good Friday. During the Good Friday service there is a hauntingly beautiful hymn called "The Reproaches" in which God asks his people this question, **"My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!"** This is the refrain to the ancient hymn. In each verse God reminds the people of what was done for them in their forty-year journey through the desert. Then Christ compares that historical perspective to what happened to him on Calvary.

***"I led you from slavery to freedom  
and drowned your captors in the sea,  
but you handed me over to your priests.***

***"I opened the sea before you,  
but you opened my side with a spear.***

***"I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud,  
but you led me to Pilate's court.***

***"I bore you up with manna in the desert,  
but you struck me down and scourged me.***

***"I gave you saving water from the rock,  
but you gave me gall and vinegar to drink.***

***"For you I struck down the kings of Canaan,  
but you struck my head with a reed.***

***"I gave you a royal scepter,  
but you gave me a crown of thorns.***

***"I raised you to the height of majesty,  
but you have raised me high on a cross."***

Throughout history God has done miraculous, wondrous deeds in order to save his people from the calamities and trials that cause so much pain and suffering, and in each of these world changing events, people soon took God's grace for granted; they soon forgot what God had done for them. When humans needed God's saving grace the most, he came into the world as one like us in all things but sin. The leaders of the people Jesus came to help were so threatened by what he said and did; they rejected him, persecuted him and had him put to death. Not only that, he was abandoned by those who followed him and claimed to believe in him.

As we look at the world today, it is easy for us to see that we are still very much in need of God's saving grace in our lives. But, are we willing to receive that grace? Are we willing to give up extra time to attend the Good Friday service this year? Our lives are so full. We are busy from sunrise to sunset, and there is so much stress and anxiety in

our lives. Our culture has turned away from the experience of worshipping God as a faith community, especially in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Pew Research Center published a report entitled The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey and it contains some rather frightening information. It says that 16.1% of the 35,000 people interviewed have no religious affiliation. Four percent of those who are unaffiliated with any religious denomination are either atheist or agnostic, the other 12% simply say they are “Nothing in particular.” If the “Unaffiliated” were a religious group they would be the fourth largest in the country. Clearly this is a sign that a significant number of people do not care about organized religion, or the traditions of being Christian.

In another part of the survey it says that the largest movement away from religious practice to being unaffiliated comes from the Roman Catholic faith. 10% of all Americans are former Catholics.

***“My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!”***

We are going to answer to God some day. In the mean time, we, as a Church, have a lot of work to do. The trends we are seeing indicate that, on one hand, a lot of people do not seem to have much concern about religion. On the other hand, an even greater number of people are searching for spiritual answers that will suit them best. Clearly, there is no perfect religious denomination. The Church is a living, human institution with so much to offer, and yet, with many limitations. However, we know that God comes into the world to save us, to offer us grace, mercy and compassion beyond our wildest dreams. We, in turn, must strive to be open to what our faith has to offer. The Triduum we celebrate reveals the deepest truth of God’s love.

***“Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** (Philippians 2:6-11)

Please come to celebrate the Paschal Mystery this Good Friday. I hope and pray this powerful service just might be one of the most spiritually insightful and convincing experiences of our lives. God is with us. God has come to save us. Are we willing to let him?

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel