

The Church of the Transfiguration  
Good Friday  
John 18:1 – 19:42

## What's So "Good" About Good Friday?

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What is so "good" about Good Friday?

The Passion narrative that you just heard is filled with all kinds of horrible things that happened to Jesus during the last days of his life: his betrayal by Judas; his disciples abandoning him; his disciple Peter denying him three times; his torture and mocking by the Roman soldiers; and his execution by Pontius Pilate, despite his being an innocent man.

A lot of horrible things are also happening in our own country right now. The author and public theologian Diana Butler Bass recently wrote about the disturbing parallels between that first Holy Week two thousand years ago, and what is occurring in the United States today. She writes:

A corrupt, authoritarian government seizes an innocent man, tortures and jails him on trumped-up charges that change during a manipulated "legal" process. The prisoner is left at the mercy of dehumanizing politicians and jailers to do with what they please.  
Holy Week then. America now.

In light of all the suffering described in the Passion narrative – as well as all the suffering around us today – why should we even bother with Good Friday? Do we really need more pain and suffering in our lives?

What's so "good" about Good Friday?

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Well, I believe that there are three things that remind us why Good Friday is "good."

First, Good Friday helps us to focus on what's really important: the saving nature of the cross.

The stripped-down nature of today's liturgy – that is, the absence of our usual vestments, the missing altar frontal and decorations, and the lack of a eucharistic prayer – focuses our attention on the cross.

It is through the cross that the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was reversed. It is through the cross that the chain of original sin was broken. Paradoxically, a horrific instrument of death has become for us the means to eternal life.

Later in the liturgy, the Rector will carry the cross from the Holy Family Chapel to the chancel steps and chant three times: "Behold the wood of the Cross, whereon was hung the world's Salvation."

Immediately after that, you will be invited to come to the chancel steps and to venerate the cross as a sign of Christ's gift of love and forgiveness to us.

Good Friday is “good” because it helps us to focus on the saving nature of the cross.

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Second, Good Friday reminds us that we are not alone: God suffers with us.

Our God is not some abstract, remote, and sadistic being who sits on a throne and couldn’t care less about our suffering.

In fact, it’s the very opposite of that. God so loved the world that God became a human being. In the person of Jesus Christ, God experienced the depths of physical and emotional pain that is described in the Passion narrative.

As such, we should remember that we are never alone in our suffering. No matter how bad things might seem, we can take comfort in knowing that God has experienced great suffering as well.

God does not *will* our suffering. Rather, God stands in solidarity *with* our suffering.

Good Friday is “good” because it reminds us that God suffers with us.

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Third, and perhaps most importantly, Good Friday promises us that suffering and death is never the last word.

You cannot get to Easter Sunday without first going through Good Friday. But the opposite is also true: you cannot have Good Friday without also having Easter Sunday.

Although it might be hard for us to see beyond the foot of the cross at times, we must remember that the empty tomb is just around the corner. The pain of Good Friday will not last forever. When things are really difficult, we might not know exactly *when* Easter will happen. But we do know that Easter *will* happen.

So even if we are in the midst of great suffering and pain, we should never succumb to the sin of despair.

Good Friday is “good” because it promises us that, no matter how hard things might be, suffering and death is never the last word.

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So what’s so “good” about Good Friday?

Good Friday is “good” because it helps us to focus on the saving nature of the cross. Good Friday is “good” because it reminds us that God suffers with us. And Good Friday is “good” because it promises us that suffering and death is never the last word.