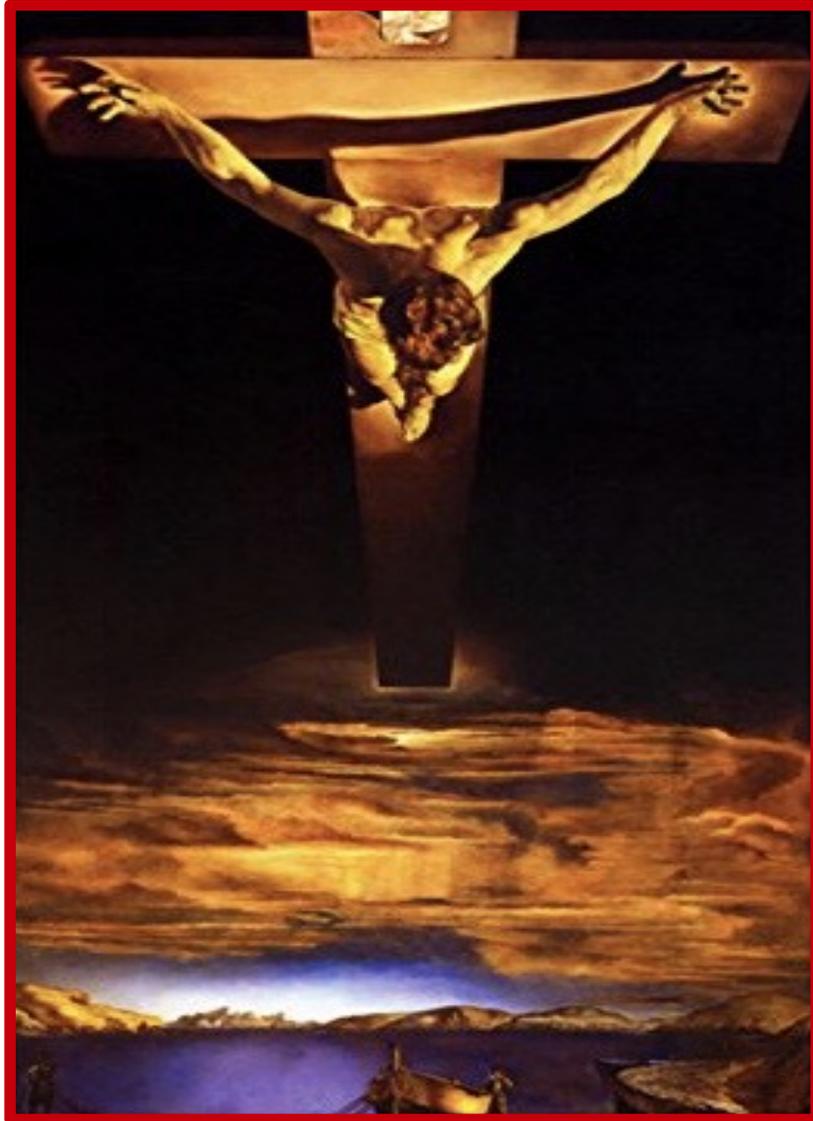


# What is 'Good' about Good Friday?



April 10, 2020

It was clearly a day full of evil - the great hubris of the religious & political authorities; the highly deceptive & unjust legal process; the active, conscious fomenting of a mob mentality that follows neither reason nor conscience; and the blatant glorification of sadistic violence. It was clearly a day when humanity was revealed at its worst.

It was also day when the "glory" of what Jesus called "the world" was revealed as it is. As tragic.

In our day, the word — "tragic" — has come to simply mean "awful" —something terribly bad & sad that never should have happened. But in the ancient world, it had a fuller, richer meaning, that explained *why* the awful thing happened, and how it could have been prevented. "Tragic" was an ancient theatre word.

In a "tragic" story, the hero is "blind" to the error of his ways. He acts, thinking that he is making the very best response, but then discovers that — *in truth* — his action was terribly misguided, and the root cause of his suffering & downfall. Although he believed he was choosing life, he had actually chosen death. Sometimes betraying the one person who had his true best interest in mind, the one he should have trusted. But, at the time of his tragic choice, he didn't know what he was doing. He **thought** he did, but he was gravely mistaken.

Good Friday is "tragic" in this ancient sense of the word. The religious & political leaders, the bloodthirsty mob, the sadistic soldiers were the "tragic heroes," who imagined they were doing good, when — in truth — they were turning the one person who had their best interest in mind into their "scapegoat" (the one they blamed for all their problems, the one whose death would increase the quality of their lives.) And they were in their glory.

Do we even need to say that the Good Friday mob and their leaders were "*under the influence*" of harmful illusions about God, themselves, and others?

Throughout Holy Week, we have been highlighting that what Jesus called "*the world*" is not the planet earth, nor the human race as such, but **the tragic dimension of our human world**, the part of us that is "lost" in harmful illusions & acting them out against our common good. Good Friday is the culmination of this tragic ignorance. But back to our question: *What is "good" about Good Friday?*

We all know what good and evil are. Or, at least, we **think** we know (most of the time.) But, as it was in the beginning, and is now, our knowledge of good & evil is not always true. Our hearts & minds can get "lost" in harmful illusions — about God, ourselves, and others — illusions that we fervently believe are sound & wise. We've watched it happening in the twelve apostles throughout Holy Week.

The Good Friday mob, and its leaders, thought they were rightly discerning between good & evil. For if what they were doing to Jesus was evil, surely God Almighty would have reached down with his furious hand, taken him off the cross, and slaughtered them all in violent revenge.

But no legions of warrior angels came. Nor did the ground open up & swallow them down into Sheol. Nor had God formed the minority who opposed them into a formidable army — to rescue Jesus & strike down his enemies (*as he struck down the Egyptians & rescued the righteous at the first Passover.*) So what they were doing to Jesus must indeed be good, must indeed be blessed by God Almighty, they thought.

But the good news of Good Friday is that God is not like that. **We** can be like that, most definitely, but God is not. God is like Jesus, who — in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit — free of all such illusions — humbly says "*I forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Still, it takes Jesus time to get there.

In the onslaught of being shamed, reviled, and tortured in the name of God, he experiences his last & greatest temptation — the agony of feeling that God is gone. He puts the feeling into words, and shouts aloud: *"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"*

We don't hear the Father's answer to the Son's question. We only hear the wisdom & compassion it brings forth in the mind of Jesus when — **empty** of the fear of abandonment — he responds back: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

And with that response of forgiving, redeeming love to the tragic dimension of the human world, it is finished. His Good Friday mission is accomplished.

The Good of Good Friday is the **awakening** it causes in human hearts & minds. Awakening to the reality that God is **not** like a Vengeful Tyrant, *but like an innocent, wise, humble, and compassionate servant*. God is like Jesus. One whom, *if we're not too disappointed with & ashamed of*, we can easily fall in love with, and bring an end to our tragic strivings. This is God's hope for us and our world.

Thanks be to God.

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