

Good Friday (B) 04/03/2015

Almost 60 years ago, a psychiatrist named Viktor Frankl wrote a best-selling book called "Man's Search for Meaning".

It was about his experiences as a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz .

The book is considered to be a classic about the worst nightmare of the last century.

In the book, Frankl describes how men, women and children coped with the enormous horrors of the concentration camp; how they were able simply to survive, day after day, week after week.

At one point he tells the haunting story of a woman who knew she was going to die in just a few days. Despite that she was remarkably calm, even cheerful.

One morning, Frankl approached this woman and asked her how she did it. How was she able to keep her spirits up?

The woman told him that she had come to a deeper appreciation of spiritual things during her time in the camp.

Then, he writes:

Pointing thru the window of the hut, the woman said, "This tree is the only friend I have here in my loneliness." Thru the window, she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree, & on the branch were two blossoms.

"I often talk to this tree," she said ...Frankl asked her if the tree replied. "Yes" she said. What did it say to her? She answered, "It said to me. 'I am here. I am here. I am life. Eternal life.' "

In that astonishing moment, Frankl discovered something profound.

In our bleakest moments, in even the darkest of places, we look for life.

We want a promise of something better.

We want to know that life goes on. We hunger for hope.

Hope, however fleeting, was there in Auschwitz that day. And, whether we realize it or not, hope is what has brought us together this evening.

In one sense we are remembering an event that seems completely hopeless -- the agony and death of Jesus Christ.

Today, in this liturgy, we re-read the story of His passion.

We feel a deep & muffled emptiness.

The altar is stripped; the church is barren; there is no consecration; no bells, no final blessing.

For some people, it's still customary to turn off the radio, shut off the TV, draw the curtains and pray.

Some may quietly light candles. Others may follow the Way of the Cross, or pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary.

The simple fact is: this cannot be a day like any other. Scripture tells us that on the day Christ died, the world – literally – cracked open. The earth quaked.

To this day, we cannot help but remember what was done for us. As the old spiritual tells us, it causes us to tremble.

But still in the midst of all this, we do something human and hopeful.
We come to honor & venerate the Cross with a kiss.

I'm sure some people outside our faith find it strange that we seem to pay tribute to an instrument of death.

But they don't see the Cross the way
we do.

We see the Cross as the place where we can leave all our burdens & failings at the feet of the One who was called the Friend of sinners.

We see in the Cross the beginning of our salvation. This is the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Savior of the world.

We look at the Cross where Jesus stretched out his arms between heaven & earth in the everlasting covenant of God's merciful love;

A covenant that was sealed with nails, and suffering and blood so that all of us might be set free from sin.

In the reading from Isaiah today, the prophet tells us about the suffering servant who fore shadows Christ.

Isaiah says: "it was our infirmities that he bore, and our sufferings that he endured."

In Christ's Cross, the wood we venerate and touch, we are able to see this wood for what it truly is:

a tree that holds out hope.

From within the four walls of our own brokenness, behind the barbed wires of our own sins, we look out –

and we see this "tree" that symbolizes our salvation.

This is how we know we are saved;
Not because we are good or holy;
But we are saved simply because we are loved by God.

This evening, the Cross of Christ reaches out to us.
It speaks of the Merciful One who suffered & died upon it. It speaks to us of Hope.

And quietly it offers us the promise of something better, beyond any prison wall.

And if we listen very carefully we will hear the words—
Come to Me: "I am here. I am life. I am Eternal life."