

Good Friday
April 22, 2011
Fr. Tom Elliott

The Crucifix

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 31

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1—19:42

Many artists throughout salvation history have created renderings of the saints. Often, when depicting saints, artists will show them in light of their most loving, sacrificial act. For example, Saint Bartholomew is depicted by Michelangelo as holding his own flayed skin, as that was the way he was martyred. Saint Sebastian is often shown bound to a pillar, with arrows piercing his body. These are just a couple of examples of saints who are depicted at the moment of their greatest act of love for God and at a moment of great sacrifice.

Today, Good Friday, we commemorate the image of God's greatest act of love and sacrifice for us—the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ has a profound significance for us. Jesus made it very clear that, as His followers, we are to embrace His example of sacrificial love and embrace our own crosses. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus states, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23) and "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). The early Christians understood the significance of the cross. Saint Paul explained this when he wrote, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14a).

In addition to the significance that the cross has for Christians, the Catholic Church loves the crucifix—the cross with the body of Christ on it. Every Catholic church has a depiction of a crucifix in it, whereas many other Christian churches do not. Our love for the crucifix is often misunderstood by other Christians. Several years ago, a friend of mine who is a non-denominational minister, visited my new parish. As I gave him a tour of the sanctuary, he looked up at the crucifix and said, "Well, I see you Catholics still haven't let Jesus rise." This is a common misunderstanding. Often, non-Catholic Christians think that the crucifix represents some sort of denial of Christ's Resurrection. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

The crucifix has particular significance for us for the same reason that the images of Saint Bartholomew and Saint Sebastian do—it depicts Christ's greatest act of love and sacrifice. And, that is the most important thing for us to commemorate and memorialize. Today, we will commemorate it in a very special way. In just a few moments, we will all have the opportunity to come forward and to make some gesture of reverence to the crucifix. The form that our gesture takes—kissing the crucifix, bowing toward it, gently touching it—isn't as important as what is in our hearts—respect and gratitude for the sacrificial love that our God has for us and reverence for the fact that Jesus "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).