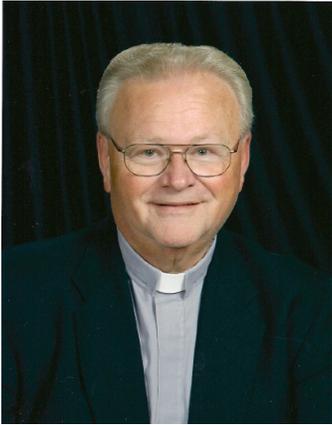


Good Friday

The liturgy on Good Friday is rather solemn and stark. We make our way to Calvary and embrace the mystery of the Cross. Our churches are bare, with no flowers or decoration; we utilize only the things that are necessary. Good Friday is the only day that we do not have Mass. The liturgy of the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord is composed of three parts: the Liturgy of the Word (including the reading of St. John's Passion and the Solemn Intercessions), the Adoration of the Cross, and Holy Communion (the faithful receive the Blessed Sacrament that has been consecrated on Holy Thursday evening).

I recall a Good Friday that occurred about 15-16 years ago. I was serving as a deacon at St. Pius X Parish in La Crosse and we were preparing to merge our parish with the parish of St. Thomas More (the new merged parish became Mary Mother of the Church Parish). St. Pius utilized the chapel at the Diocesan Center as our parish church and St. Thomas More church was a couple of miles away on the south side of La Crosse. We had a tradition at St. Pius of utilizing a very large, rough-sawn cross on Good Friday for the Adoration of the Cross portion of the liturgy. That year, for the first time, we were observing the Triduum at St. Thomas More church as it had a much larger seating capacity. Our pastor, the late Father Joe Rafacz, insisted that the only way we would successfully merge the parishes was if we would first pray together (and second, party (celebrate) together). We were going to bring the cross over to St. Thomas More, but rather than putting it in the back of a truck, we decided to physically carry it while praying the Stations of the Cross along the way.

We gathered many people, a small crowd, to begin the transfer from the Holy Cross Diocesan Center. The cross was very heavy and required 3-4 people to carry it at one time, so we took turns. If I remember correctly, Father Joe hefted the cross bar portion onto his shoulder first, and we began to sing hymns as we went down the hill and headed north on East Avenue. We would stop periodically and pray, rest a bit and change "carriers." It was especially poignant as we proceeded through Woodlawn Cemetery and prayed for all of the deceased – including my paternal grandparents who are buried there. Then we walked along Mormon Coulee Road, a very busy 4-lane thoroughfare. Many people waved and sounded their car horns in solidarity with us. We stopped to pray for travelers and at the State Office Building to pray for government officials and all those in public office.



We crossed the highway with the signal lights and people patiently waited in their vehicles as it took longer than one light cycle for everyone to get across. We walked along a street where there was a large manufacturing plant and we paused to pray for workers and especially for those who were unemployed. As we rounded the final corner, we neared a Lutheran Church and we prayed for the unity of all Christians.

That year brought to our minds in a very vivid way the connection between the Cross and the lengthy prayers of intercession that are part of this day. In that solemn part of the liturgy, we pray for the Church, our cities, our leaders, for those who do not believe in God, or who no longer perceive his love, and for all those in tribulation

– the poor, sick, outcast, and those who experience the misfortune of society's ills. Our Lord, Jesus, gave himself totally to our human condition and from the Cross He embraces all of our joys and sorrows. For it is not the iron nails that bind Him to the Cross, but rather it is His self-sacrificing love for us all.