

Good Friday 2016—Reflection—by Cathy Dempsey

Before Pete and I moved here from Kansas City in 2004, I had been in a Master's Degree program in Pastoral Ministry, sponsored by the Aquinas Institute of Theology. I remember looking forward to my courses on liturgy and lay preaching and Scriptures. I have to say, though, that when we were preparing for our course on Christology, I was pretty scared.

Of course, I had been a Christian all my life, but the prospect of focusing on the theology of Christ, trying to speak intelligently about Christ, much less to be *graded* on my understanding of the theology of Christ, was pretty daunting.

That course in Christology, though, turned out to be a great blessing to me in many ways. The greatest blessing to me from that course was finally coming to a sense of understanding, an answer to a question I had struggled with for many years: Did Jesus have faith? And in fact, did Jesus even need faith?

And the time that I always struggled with that question most every year was now—on Good Friday. Here's how the question always came up in my mind. Jesus is fully human and fully divine, right? On Good Friday, he is condemned, abandoned by his friends, and dies a painful, humiliating death, all for love of us. Very horrifying and painful, no doubt. But here's the question that kept bothering me in the back of my mind. If Jesus is fully divine as well as human, then shouldn't he know that in three days he's going to rise again, and that his friends will come back to him again and believe in him and follow him? Suffering and dying on the cross takes a lot of love, but if you already know how it's all going to turn out, it seemed to me that's a whole other thing. It just didn't seem as if it really took any faith.

So that was the question that kind of rolled around in my head every Good Friday for years, and mostly I tried not to think about it too much.

Then came my professor in my Christology course. One of the Scripture passages that he referred to frequently during the course was the passage we had from Philippians (2:6-11) as our second reading last Sunday: Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

I finally worked up the nerve to just ask outright in class one day: “So did Jesus actually know as he was dying there on the cross that everything was cool, that 3 days later he was going to rise again, and then 50 days after that the Holy Spirit would come down, and then he’d ascend into heaven, etc?”

Our professor explained that the passage from Philippians isn’t just talking about the crucifixion; it’s talking about the Incarnation too. When Paul talks about Jesus emptying himself, he’s talking about Jesus when he first came among us in human form. Yes, he still had all that divine knowledge available to him about exactly who was going to do what and when and how things would happen, but it was as if he wrapped it up carefully and put it aside on a shelf while he was on earth. He had all that power and knowledge available to him, but he gently put it aside, he didn’t grasp it or snatch it back or cling to it.

Jesus let all that go, and only trusted in God, and loved God and all that God had created. In trusting God and loving God and us, Jesus came to have deep understanding of us and intuition, but it’s not as if he read the last chapter of the book first—he didn’t “know” what was

going to happen in that sense. That kind of knowing was what he set aside when he became human; he emptied himself of that kind of knowing.

He kept only the knowing that God was good and loving and could be trusted. And that, I finally understood, was the faith of Jesus.

I have to say, I felt a lot better after that.