

Good Friday

April 15, 2022

St. Patrick

“Knock on wood.” Three thumps, and all of us have been there when someone has done it—or we ourselves—for luck. “Knock on wood”—that I don’t faint again!

We just do it, with the words, “Knock on wood.” The origin of this superstitious gesture may well go back to our devotion to the wood of Christ’s cross. (1)

We gather today—not to knock on wood, but to reverence it. Stretching back to the fourth century, Christians have gathered with loving affection on Good Friday in order to venerate the wood of the cross of the crucified Jesus.

Now, St. Patrick’s, we do so not to re-enact *his* Good Friday. We don’t pretend it’s happening now just as it did on Calvary. No, Friends, *once and for all* Jesus has laid down his life for us, gaining our salvation in his own blood. No, we gather together in order to *remember* his dying and rising, and to link *our* Good Friday—this 2022—with *his*.

I love to watch the faces of folks as they venerate the cross. They may kiss the cross, or touch it tenderly, or hug it lovingly. The faces before the cross reflect a myriad of feelings and emotions—on one hand, suffering and sorrow and anger; on the other hand, tender affection and gratitude (2).

Oh, “the blood reddening Calvary’s earth was his,” that of Jesus (3). This Good Friday we remember the blood reddening the earth of Ukraine—innocent blood flowing from an unjust war unleashed on an innocent people. Some of that blood, though, is of Russian soldiers, many of them not even aware of why they were fighting. As a people, we bring Ukraine’s suffering to the cross this Good Friday.

Indeed, we also bring to the cross this Good Friday the bloodshed of violence on our own streets, in our homes, in our schools—here, within Memphis, and also throughout our nation.

Yes, we kiss the cross, and we bring to it the more than a million people in our country who have died these past two years from COVID, and the hundreds of thousands who have perished worldwide. With them, we bring the heartache and the lasting absence felt by loved ones.

Friends, you know how you share now in the passion, the suffering, of Jesus. Hold nothing back.

**“Behold, the wood of the cross, on which has hung the Savior of the world!
Come, let us worship!”**

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- (1) See Michael Quinlon. “Knock on wood,” in www.worldwidewords.org. Also, “Knock on wood,” in www.en.wikipedia.com.
 - (2) See Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., “Where Is Your Good Friday?” in Sir, We Would Like to See Jesus: Homilies from a Hilltop (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 54-55.