THE AGONY OF CROSS

by

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Good Friday online Service (noon & 7 pm)

April 2, 2021 (All Saints Episcopal)

Scripture – John 19:1-30

As we, believers of both the humanity and divinity of Jesus, our Lord, reflect on His suffering for us on this day, I believe it is important that we remember how horrible the death was that Jesus endured for you and me.

Jesus has known since His youth that He was the promised Messiah and His mission on earth was to die, by crucifixion, to save humankind’s sins. Since He was truly human, He agonizingly wrestled with the thought of dying as evidenced by His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, as recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22, where He said “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done”

He was arrested and brought before Caiaphas, the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, and Pontius Pilate, where He was questioned, struck and spit upon as recorded in Matthew 26:65-68.

In John 19, The Apostle John tells how Jesus was taken out and flogged.

Douglas Jacoby describes what Roman flogging entailed: “A man to be flogged was stripped of his clothes and his hands tied to a post above his head. He was then whipped across the shoulders, back, buttocks, thighs and legs, the soldier standing behind and to one side of the victim. The whip used – the flagellum – was designed to make this a devastating punishment, bringing the victim close to death: several short heavy leather thongs, with two small balls of lead or iron attached near the end of each. Pieces of sheep’s bone were sometimes included.

As the scourging proceeds, the heavy leather thongs produce first superficial cuts, then deeper damage to underlying tissues. Bleeding becomes severe when not only capillaries and veins are cut, but also arteries in the underlying muscles. The small metal balls first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by further blows. The fragments of sheep’s bone rip the flesh as the whip is drawn back. When the beating is finished, the skin of the back is in ribbons, and the entire area torn and bleeding.”

The soldiers then mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews”. They the put a robe on Him with a crown of thorns which was pressed into His head, spit on him, and struck him on the head repeatedly with a staff. Dr. Mark Eastman says, “Jesus had not drunk since the night before, so the combination of the beatings, the crown of thorns, and the scourging would have set into motion an irreversible process of severe dehydration and cardiorespiratory failure. All of this was done so that the prophecy of Isaiah would be fulfilled.”

After all this physical punishment, they led Jesus out to be crucified at Calvary with two thieves. Jesus had lost so much blood during the flogging, in addition to dehydration, that He was too weak to carry the crossbeam of His cross which typically weighed 70-90 pounds. So, the Romans enlisted a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, to carry it for Him as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Again, Douglas Jacoby describes what Jesus endured when He was nailed to the cross, which was endured for all that suffered this horrible death:

“Thrown down on his back with arms outstretched along the crossbar, nails were driven through Jesus’ wrists into the wood. These iron spikes, about 6 inches long and 3/8 inch thick, cut the large sensorimotor median nerve, causing excruciating pain in both arms. Carefully placed between bones and ligaments, they were able to bear the full weight of the crucified man. In preparation for the nailing of the feet, Jesus was lifted up and the crossbar fixed to the upright post. Then with legs bent at the knee, a nail was driven through each ankle into the cross. Again, there was severe nerve damage and the pain caused was intense. It is important to note, however, that neither the wounds to the wrists or feet caused substantial bleeding, since no major arteries were ruptured. The executioner took care to ensure this, so that death would be slower and the suffering longer.

It is said that the Romans knew that once the victim was finally hanging from the cross, it could take hours for him to die. As he fought off suffocation, he was forced to take the next breath by laboriously pulling himself up by his wounded hands and feet. “The pain was absolutely unbearable,”

Dr. Alexander Metherell, PhD says. “In fact, it was literally beyond words to describe; they had to invent a new word: excruciating. Literally, excruciating means *out of the cross*.”

It is believed that many factors contributed to Jesus’ death. A combination of shock and suffocation killed most victims of crucifixion, but in Jesus’ case acute heart failure may have been the final trauma. This is suggested by His sudden death following a loud cry, after only a few hours. A fatal cardiac arrhythmia, or perhaps cardiac rupture, are likely possible causes of death.

The Apostle John tells us, in Chapter 19:30, that, after all the suffering, Jesus was able to say before He died, “It is Finished”. It is Finished. He fulfilled His Mission. Jesus faithfully gave His life for our sins, dying an agonizing death, so you and I could have eternal life. Oh, how could someone love me that much?

In Jesus Name. Amen.