

It's Good Friday again

It's Good Friday again – that barren day in the church year. Yet, people come to its service. Surely they come, not because it is a holy day of obligation, which it is not. Surely, they come, not because it is the only day that Mass is not celebrated. Surely, they come, not because of another long gospel, a different version of the Passion narrative they heard the previous Sunday, if they attended Mass. Surely, they come, not because they are glad that Lent is over and they can get back to business as usual. Surely, they come, not out of excitement to celebrate the death of a God-Man. So, why do they come?

I wonder why the young and old, the lame and near-sighted, the well known and unknown; the farmer and office worker; the housewife and hell raiser; the teenager and live-in partner; the young baby and the young at heart; the recently bereaved and the recently gifted; the knotted couple and the unravelling relationship. They form an unusual march up the aisle to kiss a lonely figure on a crucifix. There is no marching band to accompany them; their movement is sporadic and chaotic; the shuffle of the feet of hundreds of persons are out of step with each other and no one notices or seems to care.

In front of the altar, an elderly priest stands holding a crucifix at arm's length while each person approaches to kiss the crucifix. It doesn't matter what part they kiss – the feet, the head, the heart, the arms. Some, unsteady on their feet, reach out to hold the cross momentarily as they kiss it. In robotic fashion, the priest wipes each kissed spot with a small white cloth that becomes imprinted with a Veronica like kiss of lipstick.

The elderly priest watches as each person approaches. He notices Mary approaching with her two year old girl by her side. The little girl watches as Mary kisses and looks lovingly at her daughter to see if she wishes to kiss the cross. She does hesitatingly. Mother and daughter bond momentarily with the lonely figure on the cross.

Behind Mary, there is Jack. Jack just lost his wife to cancer a few weeks ago. He visits her grave in the local cemetery almost daily to continue with his own tears, questions and unfinished business.

Maureen follows. She is a young teenager, full of life and promise. Hurriedly, she bends to kiss the cross but doesn't quite connect. Awkwardly, she moves on.

Next, there is Joan, a woman admired and well known. She approaches, knowing that the results of her breast biopsy will be known in a few days. She kisses and moves on.

John follows her. He is in his eighties. His ears don't hear as well as before; his eyes don't see as well as before. Still he comes, linked by two gentlemen as they hold on to him as he kisses the cross and moves on.

The line continues at its own pace. Finally, the cross is put away for another Good Friday. Yet, I still wonder about this ritual that seems to captivate all. I am sure that the elderly priest wonders too what motivates such a ritual. Are these people bringing their own crosses to the great cross? Are they, in some way, laying their own crosses with a kiss of gratitude at the feet of one who didn't deserve a cross?

All the crosses, big and small, were carried to the great cross. All the lives of quiet desperation, as Thoreau reminds us, were carried to the one great cross that gave meaning and hope to generation past, present and future.

Finally, I wonder if all the people that Good Friday are really kissing a cross. Instead, could they possibly be kissing, not a cross, but a life and love and its price in action. After all, behind the cross is a person. Behind the person is love and it was love that crucified the cross on Good Friday. Maybe, that is why we call it "Good Friday."