

Good Friday

During World War II prisoners of war in a Japanese camp were on a work detail on the railway. The day's work had ended, the tools were being counted as usual. As the party was about to be dismissed the Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing. He insisted that someone had stolen it to sell. Striding up and down before the men, he anted and raved and denounced them for their wickedness and their ingratitude to the Emperor. As he raved he worked himself up into a paranoid fury. Screaming in broken English, he demanded that the guilty one step forward and take his punishment. No one moved. The guard's rage reached the heights of violence. "All die. All die." He shrieked.

To show that he meant business he cocked his rifle and pointed it at the men, ready to shoot. At that moment one of the soldiers stepped forward, stood stiffly at attention and said calmly, "I did it." The guard unleashed all his pent up hate. He kicked the soldier and beta him with his fists. Still the soldier stood at attention, blood streaming down his face. His silence goaded the guard into even greater fury. The guard, the barrel of the gun lifted high over his head, with a final blow brought it down on the soldier's skull, who sank limply to the ground and did not move. Although it was perfectly clear the man was dead, the guard continued to beat him, stopping only when he became exhausted.

The men of the work detail picked up their comrade's body, shouldered their tools and marched back to camp. When the tools were counted again at the guardhouse, no shovel was missing.

We just heard the account of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ for us and for all people. Although Jesus is risen form the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father, he still continues to suffer and die among us, like the soldier killed by the angry guard. Jesus suffers in all victims of injustice; those accused unjustly of crimes, those starving to death when it is not necessary, the weak who are victimized by the powerful, and the list goes on

and on. On this Good Friday we are invited to look at those areas of victimization and to see what we can do to help.

We can't, in these situations, be like Pontius Pilate who could have ended the whole thing. But we can be like Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his cross, by getting involved in those organizations which work to eliminate injustice. We can be like Veronica who wiped the face of Jesus by offering to assist those who are suffering by at least easing their suffering partially. We can be like the women of Jerusalem who lamented Jesus by letting those who suffer know that our hearts are with them and that we are praying for them. We can be like Joseph of Arimathea who went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus by working with government agencies to alleviate injustice and suffering wherever it exists.

None of us will ever eliminate the suffering Christ in our midst by ourselves but by consistently working the risen Lord will emerge in our midst. We adore you O Christ and we praise you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world. May we be part of that redemption.