

## Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord

*Notre Dame* are the two French words for “Our Lady.” The cathedral that bears her name in Paris has attracted tourists who marvel at its beautiful architecture, sitting within the arms of the Seine River and the heart of the city. It specifically attracts believers to the religious center of a diocese. Although the building is named for the mother of Jesus, its purpose is to provide for the worship of God. Catholics sincerely love Our Lady, but even she would remind us to pay more attention to her Son than to her. She is his disciple too.

In John’s gospel she appears at Calvary after a long absence. The previous time John told of her was at the wedding in Cana, the very beginning of Jesus’ mission. At that time, Jesus and his mother had some difference: she believed he should provide for the material needs of banqueters; he believed he should wait for the hour that his Father had designated for more important work.

Near the end of the gospel, when the hour has come, she reappears at the foot of the cross with an important character, the one called the beloved disciple. He was probably a follower of special status who then led an early Christian community that gave us this gospel. Just before Jesus died on the cross, as his last action before the gospel says “everything was now finished,” he entrusted to each other two people identified by their relationship to him: his mother and the disciple he loved. In giving his mother to his beloved disciple, he closed the gap between family and follower. Those closest to him are not just those related in the flesh, but those related in the spirit. The disciple becomes his brother, and the mother becomes his disciple.

This cathedral too is named for her under a different title, the Immaculate Conception. *Notre Dame* is a kind of sister to us because we are both cathedrals, both named for titles of the mother of Jesus, both visible on the city skyline, and both houses for the worship of God. The fire at *Notre Dame* has fueled our sense of loss. We can only imagine the pain of Parisians today; we can only imagine the pain of those who on the first Good Friday lost Jesus: a friend, a teacher, a brother and a son. To stare at the charred remains of *Notre Dame* is like meditating on Christ crucified. The damage to that cathedral seems to be an accident, but the death of Jesus resulted from the deliberate actions of human beings set on taking his life. The cross lays bare the faults of humanity - the jealousy we hold toward people of talent, the overly severe punishment we inflict on prisoners, the illogical choice of the death penalty to illustrate the evils of murder, and the misguided actions we take to embarrass, hurt and hate. Like the flames at *Notre Dame*, Good Friday fixes our eyes on loss - even on our own sin - in order to stir our desire to turn from sin and follow a better path. That will make us faithful disciples, beloved by Christ.

Friday, April 19, 2019