

A couple of years ago I read a homily that got me thinking.

It was a homily given by Rev. Michael Piazza.

Rev. Piazza began this homily by talking about the concept
of human sacrifice used to appease angry gods.

That homily caused me to do a little research.

Human sacrifices can be traced back well beyond 50,000 years ago—

We find it practiced among the ancient Aztecs and the ancient Chinese.

We find it among the Monguls, Ethiopians, and Scythians.

We find the practice of human sacrifice

among the ancient Romans and Greeks.

And as much as we don't like to admit it, we find it in the Hebrew scriptures
in the almost sacrifice of Isaac and in the book of Judges

where Jephthah sacrifices his daughter because of vow made to the Lord.

And what about this, words from our readings today:

The Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all...

The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity...

He shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses.

And what about this:

Then they handed him over to be crucified...

and they took him to Golgatha and there they crucified him

and with him two others, one on either side and Jesus in the middle...

And by this death, God's wrath was satisfied,

and the gates of heaven were opened.

Although it wasn't said quite that way, that's what I was told as I grew up.

That's what I grew up believing.

And maybe it's right.

But there is a part of that story that doesn't ring true to me.

And so today, I offer you that which I have wrestled with

for the last few years and invite you to wrestle with it a little yourself—

in your own prayer time this Good Friday.

And so I ask you to reflect with me for a couple of moments

on perhaps another way to look at Good Friday.

What if God did not demand that Jesus die to satisfy his anger,
or wrath, or even as the just punishment for our sins?

What if Jesus didn't need to die to persuade God to forgive us or love us?
What if God simply loved us because it's in God's nature to love?

What if God really is that loving parent who loves his/her children
no matter what they do, no matter how many times they fall?

What if God really is like the father in the prodigal son who runs to his child
and embraces him even after he has squandered all that he had to live on?

What if God really is that Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 in the field
and goes off searching for the one that is lost?

Maybe our God isn't a God who needs human sacrifice at all,
not even for his own son.

And maybe, just maybe, we created that version of salvation,
not because God can't tolerate sin, but because we just can't
conceive of true, undeserved, unconditional love.

Why then did Jesus die, if not for the forgiveness of our sins?

Perhaps Jesus died not to convince God to love us,
but to convince us that we are loved by God.

Perhaps Jesus died to show us in a complete and total and final way
just how much he loved us...

No greater love is there than this to lay down one's life for a friend.

Maybe that's why we call this day Good Friday!

Don't get me wrong...I'm not trying to challenge 2000 years of theology.
I don't know that this line of thought is any more complete or accurate
or real.

Perhaps as with so many things it is not an either/or but a both/and;
I don't know, but I do know this!

I know that God loves us
and has from the first moment of our conception.

I know that God's love for us is unconditional, even though
we can't really fathom what true unconditional love really means.

I know that grace, God's friendship with us,
abounds not because of anything we do, but simply because God is love.

I know that no one took Jesus' life from him, not even God,
but that he laid it down freely to reconnect us to our God.

And I know this. God wants a personal relationship with each one of us.
God wants to connect with us because God loves us so much.

You see when push comes to shove, I believe in the power of the cross;

I believe in the power of the cross
not as a sign of God's divine retribution, but as a sign of God's great love,
made manifest in the person of Jesus, who because of his great love
laid down his life for us
laid down his life for his friends.