

April 3, 2015 Good Friday Homily

Brothers and sisters, in reflecting on the accounts of our Blessed Lord's passion and death in the gospels of Mark and John, I am reminded of a rather disturbing scene in the 1939 film adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. It features the story's main character, Quasimodo, the bell ringer at the great Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. It is surely no exaggeration to say that Quasimodo is a grotesque, repulsive man who was unkindly regarded as a freak.

During the annual feast of the Festival of Fools, Quasimodo is crowned the king of fools. After he receives his paper crown he is hoisted on a throne and paraded around the City of Paris by a jeering mob. The message is clear: the absurdity that one as ugly as the hunchback could be considered worthy of royal dignity and honor.

Let us now consider the person of Christ on the day we commemorate his death on the cross. First, the haunting words describing the suffering servant in today's first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

"There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, no appearance that would attract us to him". He was "one of those from whom men hide their faces".

Not surprisingly, the early Christians recognized in this mysterious person Christ Himself! And then there were the Roman soldiers who mistreated Christ. They clothed him in a purple garment (The very color worn by the emperors); they placed a crown of thorns on his head; they struck him with a reed (A mock version of the royal staff of the emperor and a symbol of power); they knelt before him in homage (bending the knee in worship was part of the ritual observed in royal courts); and finally they addressed him in an insulting fashion: "Hail, King of the Jews", an echo of the traditional Latin greeting to the Roman Emperor, "Ave Caesar"! (Hail, Caesar!)

The soldiers presented to the crowd a weak and ineffectual king, a ridiculous figure, or so it seemed. Perhaps you may now understand why I recalled the cruel mistreatment of one of literature's most memorable characters, Quasimodo!

When Pilate presented Christ to the crowd, He cried, "Ecce Homo" (Behold, the man). After the beatings and scourging, He must have been a pathetic sight! Yet when Pilate said, "Behold, your king" he was assuming the role of a great prophet without fully realizing the significance of his words.

One of the many ironies of St. John's Gospel is that from the cross Jesus is indeed king. The cross is his royal throne. He truly has been "lifted up", exalted! He is unlike any other king who has ever reigned. The sovereignty of Christ is established and proclaimed on the cross!

As we read in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is "Lord of Lords and King of Kings". St. Paul tells us that God's strength is manifest in human weakness. In considering the gospel for this Good Friday, we can point to Christ as confirmation of the great convert's wisdom and faith.

Amen!