

Good Friday
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
3 April 2026

What makes this death unique? The death of Christ on the cross is the most famous death in history. No other death has inspired artists, painters, writers and poets as much as this death. But why is this death so unique? Is it the means by which this death is accomplished? Death by crucifixion has to be an unusual punishment even for that age, right? After all, this is the most lingering and agonizing of all deaths. Certainly this was not a daily occurrence! Actually, crucifixion was a common form of execution in the Roman Empire. Crucifixion was so gruesome a punishment that it was commonly reserved for slaves and traitors who were not of Roman birth. The Jewish historian Josefus described how during the first Jewish revolt, in the year 70 CE, thousands of revolutionaries were crucified in Jerusalem, to the point that the hills run out of space for the crosses and the authorities run out of crosses for the condemned. So, it is not the means by which this death is accomplished that makes this death unique.

Is it the amount of torture applied in this case that makes it unique? We know that our Lord did not get a fair trial. We know that he was whipped with leader straps encrusted with pieces of bone at its tips. We know that he was humiliated, taunted, and ridiculed. He was spat on and slapped. And finally we know that he was forced to carry his own cross to the place of execution. In the Gospel of John, there is no Joseph of Arimathea helping Jesus with his cross. He carries his own cross to the end.

Talking about the amount of torture Jesus endured, Dr. Michael Green tells us that, "The physical effects of crucifixion were appalling...The unnatural position of the body made every movement a pain. The suspension of the wholly body on jagged iron nails driven through the most sensitive nerve centers of the wrists and ankles, ensured constant exquisite torture. The wounds of the nails and the wells from the lash soon became inflamed and even gangrenous. The body's position hindered circulation and caused indescribable pain in the chest. A raging thirst set in, brought on by the burning sun. The flies were thick around the victim. The agony of crucifixion was terrible beyond words..." (Green, Michael. "The Empty Cross of Christ", 22).

So, is it the amount of torture applied in this case what makes it unique in the history of humanity? Unfortunately, torture is as old as the human race itself. Torture has existed since the day we were expelled from paradise and it continues to exist through today. Just to recall recent history, think of the torture and

degradation to which the victims of the Holocaust were subjected. Think of the thousands of young men and women who disappeared in Argentina and Chile in the 70's and 80's. Think of the atrocities committed against the Salvadorian and Nicaraguan peoples in the 80's and 90's. Think of Rwanda in 1993 and 1994. Think of Bosnia Herzegovina in the Mid 90's, the atrocities in the Darfur over the last 25 years, the Gulf wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the first quarter of the 21st Century, the current wars in Ukraine and in Iran, just to mention a few. No, unfortunately, it is not the amount of torture that makes this case unique.

Is it the fact that the victim was innocent that makes this case unique? Unfortunately, many innocent people are incarcerated, tortured and killed around the world daily just because of the color of their skin, their political affiliation or the God they believe in. Look at the amount of innocent people languishing in prisons around this country and other countries in the world. Sadly, it is not the innocence of Christ that makes this case unique.

The uniqueness of this case is found in the person who was crucified and the reason for the sacrifice. The person dying on that cross on a garbage hill outside of Jerusalem was no other than God himself. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ willingly went to that cross to reconcile humanity to God. The greatness of this death is that just at the right time, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5). On the high altar of a simple wooden cross, Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us all.

From that most humble altar of the cross Jesus takes on the cry of the innocent people around the world who cry daily, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" And then he tells them, "Have courage for I too have been where you are." Today Jesus reminds us that although tyrants and dictators find it expeditiously to maim and kill at will, God is on the side of those who suffer because his own son died a gruesome death for those who suffer.

Jesus today takes on the cry of innocent people everywhere who are crushed under the weight of oppression and repression and he cries for them, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" And then he tells them, "I am with you, I know you, I love you, have courage for I know what you are going through. I have been there." God cares deeply for your pain and your suffering, and God will vindicate your suffering in due time. God will hold to account those who exploit and kill the poor, the innocent, the oppressed, and the disadvantaged.

Today, he takes on the cry of millions of children dying of starvation around the world, while many around the world look on in hopeless resignation or in sinful apathy. He cries on behalf of these children, "My God, My God why have you

abandoned me?” And then he tells them, “Have courage. I know what it feels like to hunger and thirst. I have been where you are.” God has given us a good world in which there are enough supplies for all, but it is human sin and evil that separate you from the resources you need. God will one day eliminate all greed and will hold to account those more concerned with extracting wealth from his creation than on helping their communities and alleviating the suffering of the world.

Today, from the simple cross, Jesus takes on the cries of sinners everywhere, even you and I, well-intentioned people who are nonetheless unable to save ourselves, people groaning under the weight of our sin. For us he cries, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” And then he tells us, “Have courage, it is for you that I offer myself as a sacrifice.” God knows of your weakness and your sin and your inability to live by his will for your life. This is why God has sent the Son to provide the means by which you are saved. God is not appalled or repelled by you. He stands ready to forgive you and to welcome you back into the fold. Just come to God in repentance and God will always welcome you back in love.

Today, Jesus cries on behalf of the lonely, the depressed, the marginalized, the betrayed, the tortured, and the abused, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” And then he tells them all, “Have courage, my love for you is endless. I know what you are going through for I myself have been where you are.” This Friday we call “Good” is a sad, somber day. This is a day for death and sacrifice. This is a day for quiet assessment and mournful self-exploration. This is a time for tilling the ground of our souls, to get the terrain ready, to fertilize the ground of our hearts in preparation for the Great Feast of Sunday Morning.

Today, on this Friday we call “good” I invite you not to fly into hope too prematurely, but to allow the sadness of this most holy moment to penetrate your soul. Allow this great tragedy to transform you from the inside out. I invite you to die to anything that binds you today. I invite you to die to your old self today and to prepare the ground of your soul for the future promise of new life. Today is a time for death.