

Good Friday, April 14, 2017

You may have seen the film, *Amistad*. It is about the revolt of African slaves aboard a Spanish ship, the *Amistad*, which takes place in 1839. The ship docks in America and the slaves are brought to trial and eventually exonerated especially by the eloquence of their defense attorney, John Quincy Adams.

Some anti-slavery protesters outside the courtroom where the slaves are being tried carry placards and Bibles. One of the slaves takes one of the Bibles, which is illustrated with paintings of the life of Christ.

Since the slave is not a Christian and did not know the English language, he turned to the illustrations. By studying them, he is able to figure out the main points in the life of Jesus, especially his cruel death on the cross and his triumphant resurrection. He explains to his fellow slaves how this man pictured in the Bible, Jesus, was mistreated and suffered just like them, but that he was vindicated and triumphed over his persecutors. The slaves began to take comfort and hope that good can win out over evil, that suffering yields to victory.

On this Good Friday, we come to remember and reflect on one of the main points in the life of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion and death, which took place 2000 years ago. We believe that Jesus took with him to death the sins of all humankind, past, present, and future, including our own. These sins which we commit more through human weakness than through evil intent enslave us and rob us of the joy which God wants for us.

Although our sins sadden and weigh us down and make us miserable, we believe that the cross that Jesus bore carries them away. By his wounds we are healed. In his blood we are washed clean. In rising from the cross, Jesus conquers sin and death not only for himself but for all who place their faith in him.

He asks only that we realize and appreciate what he has done for us. He invites us to trust in him, to love him, and to live by his teachings and example. He expects that we will accept the small crosses that come our way in life: the pains, the illnesses of mind, body, and spirit, the disappointments and setbacks that are a part of this earthly life.

Jesus Christ's love for us is summed up in the symbol of the cross. If we are well educated or illiterate, free person or slave, rich or poor, acceptance of what the cross of Jesus means can move us to be better human beings. His cross can liberate us from all that is harmful. Jesus is the great Liberator from sin and eventually from eternal death.

May our prayer on this Good Friday afternoon be: "we adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world."