

**Sermon for Good Friday | 2026**  
**By Fr. Hayden A. Butler**

“For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

The Lesson from Isaiah today places us in the middle of a poetic dialogue between God and His people. At the beginning, the Lord reveals the Servant He will raise up for the salvation of His people, one who will come from Him but will stand in solidarity as one of them. His people’s response is one of astonishment, a confession that they mistook who the Servant was because He came in a way that they did not expect and redeemed them in a manner that seemed beneath the dignity of God. He was too meek, too humble, too sorrowful, and so the people refused to consider that this was the Deliverer they needed. Their confession comes after the fact; only after the Lord’s revelation do the people recognize who was there with them all along, yet whom they could not or would not see.

This inability to see had nothing to do with visibility. Perfected by the Romans, crucifixion was intended to be a very visible death, designed specifically to send a message to all potential enemies of the empire by making a grisly spectacle of those subjected to it. We sometimes miss this fact, because we often depict and imagine the Crucifixion of Christ as a kind of solemn skyline, a trio of tall, silhouetted crosses atop a sweeping hill—distant, sanitized, wistful. But Roman crosses were only about seven feet high above the ground. The victims were just above eye level. They were crucified at the entrances to cities so that they could be mocked by the conquerors and thrust in the face of the defeated. Even children saw it. It is the last place you wanted to look, but it was unavoidable to go anywhere or get anything done.

And it was here that the Lord made His answer to the question of the ungodly in the Psalms: “Where is now thy God?” On Golgotha, the Son of Man who sojourned because there was no place to lay His head now bows His head and makes His place the wood of the Cross. There, the Son of God offered Himself for the life of the world. Thus, the Good Friday liturgy presents to all of our senses the fact of Jesus Christ, crucified for our salvation. He is revealed to our hearing in the Lessons and as we sign the Crux Fidelis; He is revealed to our vision in the unveiling of the Crucifix, and to our touch as we are invited to come forward to kiss His feet; He is revealed to our taste and smell as we are offered His Body and Blood, the fruit of the Tree of Life He makes of Himself on Calvary. Today we are called to receive Him in every way. To behold Him, we have to know Him, and to know Him we must be known by Him. His total self-oblation obliges another. His complete gift of Himself, Body and Soul, evokes our own.

We struggle to behold our Redeemer, not because He is invisible, but because we do not want to behold the way He actually comes to save us. We expect that our redemption should take a more sensible shape, require something different. Surely, my rescue should not require the Son of God, full of grace and truth, to be stripped naked, beaten beyond recognition, and nailed to a cross in humiliation. Surely my sins are not so grievous, surely my attention is not so fleeting, surely my loyalty is not so flimsy, surely my love is not so cold as to need *that*. So often, we look for a Savior whose salvation is for sins that are far more cosmetic and urbane than we want ours to be. But the spectacle of Christ crucified today is so hard to behold because in beholding Him, we behold ourselves. His sacrifice shows us who we really are as we try to live without Him.

And yet there is more to see. For beneath that truth of who we are without Him, we see again those for whom He chose to die. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. And the Son so loved us that He lay down His life for us while we were still sinners. As we stay put today and behold Him on the Cross, we behold Him beholding us. And there, instead of contempt for our disloyalty or the promise of divine retribution, we find His sorrowing, steadfast love for us, forgiving our sins and welcoming us into the family He is making there. The crucified Lord is hard for us to behold because there we see in Him all the sorrows and frailties, the shame that we so vehemently deny within ourselves, the shame that caused Adam and Eve to hide their nakedness from God in the Garden. Fixed to the Cross, He proves that He will not turn away from us. So great is His love that, as St. Julian heard our Lord say, “were there any further thing that needed to be done in love, He gladly would do it.” Today, we spilled Blood of our righteous brother and it did not call out for vengeance. Today, the Ram whose crown is thorns takes the place of Isaac. Today, the Passover Lamb gives His life to save us from the Destroyer. Today, at the gates of Jerusalem, if we will look up even just a little, Christ meets us eye to eye and face to face to draw us out of the shame and back into communion. And as we are drawn out to behold Him in His Passion, it becomes for us the beginning of our salvation again. He leads us out of the earthly Jerusalem with weeping so that we can turn again into the heavenly Jerusalem with songs of joy.

So today and together, let us not remain at a distance from the Lord who came down to us, who fixed Himself in place in abject humility so that we would not be afraid (perhaps for the first time) to draw near to Him. Approach. Be like our Lady and the Beloved Disciple. When it is time, come to His cross and kiss His feet. And then receive His Body and Blood. Let His Cross be for you the Tree of Life today to put away all that we all have marred and lost through the muddled knowledge of Good *and* Evil. And then wait. Wait for Him to rise. Wait, and get your hopes up. For He always keeps His promises, and he has promised that we will see Him again, face to face. As righteous Job saw through the prophetic eyes of holy grief: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold, and not as

a stranger.” And, as the prophet Zechariah wrote of this day: “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”