

Why commemorate the horrific anguish of Christ?

We know many fears, troubles and distress: Financial, illness, violence , crime, war and terrorism, abuse and to be the object of aggression. These fears are real for many people - even children - and are all dreadful.

The Bible knows a feeling of horror, anguish and fear that is more distressing than any of these that we hear about or encounter: It is the anguish of being a lost sinner, standing before the throne of judgment. True horror is to come before a holy God and his holy resentment for those who resisted his will and plan for their lives, consciously choosing impurity, hatred and disobedience, rather than love, faith, hope, and obedience.

The greatest fear, distress and horror is the distress of the lost on the judgment day.

This is the sorrow, the fear and the distress that Jesus experienced, from the garden of Gethsemane, to the utter darkness on the cross when he cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus knew that the judgment of God for all the sins of the world would be upon him! Not because he ever sinned, or disobeyed or transgressed, but because of the sins of the whole world.

We read about this fear in the gospels. In (KJ) Mk 14:34 Jesus says: My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death. And the NIV puts it like this: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”

But what is the cause of this overwhelming sorrow? Jesus was not overwhelmed, because he feared death; it was not Judas, or the chief priests or Pontius Pilate that brought about his anguish. It was not even the horrors of the cruel death on the cross that caused him this distress. *It was the fear of God’s judgment that brought the Saviour to the point of the raw terror of hell itself.*

But why commemorate this darkness? What are we supposed to learn from it? What is the reason that this dark night is so clearly recorded and remembered by the church for more than 20 centuries?

In the darkness of Christ’s anguish we discover who we really are, without the grace of God and the redeeming work of Jesus, without the cross and the salvation and the forgiveness of God. And we see the depth of the love and the mercy of Christ for sinners, for me and for you. We see, how much he really loves us.

After we saw what Jesus did for us, how can we not remember his commission to his disciples? Keep watch with me, and pray.

And this is how we today keep watch with him. We Go, even to the ends of the earth, and proclaim the good news of salvation, making disciples of all. After we saw his love and felt some of his sorrow and his distress at Tenebrae, how can we not go??