"For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death, and was buried." This is what we believe, in the words of the Nicene Creed. All three things.

Jesus' brown, Palestinian, Jewish body suffered three things on this day—excruciating torture on a Roman cross, complete asphyxiation and cardiac arrest, and a hasty removal out of sight into a donated tomb.

Even a hundred years later there were still hard feelings between the followers of Jesus who deserted their traditional faith and their relatives and neighbors who did not. We hear echoes of that animosity in the Gospel according to St. John. And so it is imperative for faithful Christian preachers to be crystal clear on this day.

Jesus was not killed by the Jews. If that were the case, he would have been stoned to death. No, Jesus was sentenced to death by capital punishment…by the government. Jesus was murdered on a Roman Cross—the Europeans' preferred form of torture and death.

And it was for *our sake*…for our benefit…that God was willing to endure the worst imaginable treatment from cold, hard, *human* hearts…and from bloody human hands.

If God was going to redeem it all, I suppose God wanted to take it all. Literally—*take it*…and *transform it* for good. For *good*—for goodness' sake…*and…*for *good*—for all time.

One disastrous death…by the One (and only) Son of God *for everyone…*and for all time.

"For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death, and was buried."

Many, many years before, on the final, dark, terrifying night of slavery, Moses told the Jewish people to slaughter a lamb; smear some of the blood on the doorway; roast it over a fire (like a burnt offering); and eat it hurriedly.

"Be ready to run for your lives," he said. "The LORD our God is going to pass through this land and *take away* the iron grip of our oppressors. The LORD is going to pass *through this darkness* for good—for goodness' sake. And the LORD is going to see the blood on our doorways and pass *over* us. Our good LORD will spare us."

And so, the blood of the lamb *took away* the bondage which held the Hebrews down. In the same way, the blood of Christ takes away the bondage of sin and death which holds everyone down.

Christ—*our Passover*—is sacrificed for us. He takes it all—*all* of the sin, all of the death—and transforms it *for good*.

In the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus and his disciples did *not* celebrate the Passover at their Last Supper. According to John's Gospel, Jesus did not *celebrate* the Passover; he *became* the Passover. For John tells us that Jesus was crucified on the Day of Preparation, the day *before* the evening Passover meal.

On a day *like today*, just a few hours before sunset, *our* Lamb of God was slaughtered.

The most important prayer we can pray on Good Friday is a simple, "Thank you."

O Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; thank you for having mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God who delivers us from the bondage of sin and death; thank you for having mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God who opens our hearts to your grace and truth; thank you for having mercy upon us.

Lamb of God who fills us with your (own) holy and life-giving Spirit; thank you.
Lamb of God who keeps us in the faith and communion of your holy Church; thank you.
Lamb of God who teaches us (how) to love others in the power of the Spirit; thank you.
Lamb of God who sends us (out) into the world in witness to your love; thank you.
O Lamb of God who brings us to the fullness of your peace and glory; thank you.[1]

For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death, and was buried.

Christ, our Lamb of God, who takes away the sin *and death* of the world.

Amen.

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[1] Drawn from the Prayers for Baptismal Candidates (the subject of this year's Lenten Teaching Series).