

Holy Week

### **The cross: Walking into darkness to bring light**

*It is useful – and disturbing – to read the events of Holy Week from the Apostles' point of view. If I put myself in their position on Good Friday evening, I get a sense of their utter devastation: only a few days before, when Jesus entered Jerusalem so triumphantly, I would be convinced that now Jesus was going to rule as the Messiah; when he cleared the Temple and the authorities were powerless, this feeling would become more certain. Yet, by Friday, it had all come crashing down – executed as a criminal, rejected and ridiculed by all. Still reading it as an apostle, I have abandoned him and am in hiding.*

*This reading not only stops me from rushing to the happy ending of Easter Sunday, but also makes me look deeper into why events unfolded as they did.*

*The essential feature of Jesus' actions is explained in Isaiah 50:4-7 which establishes that the servant is being used as an instrument. He is woken to 'listen like a disciple'. In Isaiah, the disciple must first of all experience himself what he is to transmit to others. In this case, the servant is completely obedient to God, offering no resistance to what he hears. (For many years, I thought he was offering no resistance to the treatment by his opponents). The servant will encounter suffering and be rejected by people, and it is then that he will know that he can put all his trust in God. Having experienced this, he can be a sign of God's saving love to the faithful, and to those who 'walk in darkness'.*

*Several times, Matthew refers to the events as fulfilling scripture; all the events, therefore, are to fulfil God's will: there is wisdom behind all that happens. The different characters are clearly unable to see this. The crowds who greet Jesus as king on Sunday demand his death on Friday, choosing instead to save Barabbas who had chosen the path of violence; even at the Last Supper, Peter seems to have no idea what is going to happen in the next 24 hours and hotly disputes Jesus' prediction that he will deny Jesus; when Judas betrays him, the trigger (the last straw?) seems to be Jesus allowing the woman to anoint him with expensive oil, which Jesus says is preparing him for burial: as a Zealot, Judas cannot allow the Messiah, the saviour of Israel, to be so passive – and betrays him for the amount laid down as the value of a slave; the religious leaders and the earthly (military) powers all reject and mock him; in Matthew, even the criminals abuse him.*

*Jesus began his journey to Calvary in the desert when he overcame the temptations to be anything other than completely obedient to God's will. His 'agony in the garden' was the devil 'returning at the appointed time': surely, Jesus' agony was not just fear of the painful death he was about to endure, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass me by' seems to me to be the desperate prayer of a man, (do we ever see Jesus as more human than in the garden?) looking for alternatives. Without the next phrase – 'not my will, but yours' – the whole of the Passion does not make sense; without his complete obedience to God's will, there would have been no victory over death and sin and we would still be choosing Barabbas. There would have been no resurrection and no new covenant, sealed by his blood.*

*Holy Week is a deeply prayerful time. Not analysing, not rushing to the happy ending, but pondering, listening without resistance, reflecting on the faith with which Jesus made his journey.*

**Martin Bennett**

### **Monday (Fr. Austin Smith, CP)**

The suffering and dying of God is regarded as essential to reach the resurrection, to which we can't get quickly enough. But this underpins not a theology of the resurrection but a superficial ideology of hope. Before outlining vast theologies of redemption, indeed before talking about the wonder of the Resurrection we should contemplate the absurdity of the death of Jesus. An open contemplation of the death of Jesus, leading to a mystical union with God, leads us to examine the depth of our assimilation of, and relationship to, the values of Jesus. It often seems that it is only at the death of someone that we come to understand, in any depth, our relationship with them.

### **Scripture (Psalm 42)**

*I thirst for God, the living God; when shall I go to see the face of God? I have no food but tears,*

*day and night, as all day long I am taunted 'Where is your God?' I shall say to God 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go around in mourning, harassed by the enemy?' Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God. Send out your light and your truth, they shall be my guide, to lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.*

### **Tuesday ((Dietrich Bonhoeffer)**

When Jesus calls his disciples to follow him, it is closely associated with the prediction of his passion. He must suffer and be rejected. Had he only suffered, Jesus might still have been applauded as the Messiah. All the sympathy and admiration of the world might have been focused on his passion. It could have been viewed as a tragedy with its own intrinsic value, dignity and honour. But in the passion, Jesus is a rejected Messiah. His rejection robs the passion of its halo of glory. Suffering and rejection sum up the whole cross of Jesus. This notion has ceased to be intelligible to a Christianity which can no longer see any difference between an ordinary human life and a life committed to Christ.

### **Scripture (Mt. 27:39-44)**

*The passers-by jeered at him: "So you would destroy the Temple and in three days rebuild it! Then save yourself if you are God's son and come down from the cross!" The chief priests and the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way "He saved others but he cannot save himself. Let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him. He has put his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him" Even the bandits who were with him taunted him in the same way.*

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### **Wednesday (Martin Luther)**

'Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge. My comprehension transcends yours. Thus Abraham went forth from his father not knowing where he was going. He trusted himself to my knowledge and cared not for his own, and came to his journey's end. Behold, that is the way of the cross. The road which is clean contrary to all that you choose or desire—that is the road you must take. To that I call you and in that you must be my disciple.'

### **Scripture (Ps. 22 )**

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. The words of my groaning do nothing to save me. My God, I call you by day but you do not answer, at night, but I find no respite. Yet you, the Holy One, in you our ancestors out their trust, they trusted you and you set them free. But I am a worm, not a man, scorn of mankind, contempt of the people; all who see me sneer and wag their heads, 'He trusted himself to Yahweh, let Yahweh set him free!' Do not hold aloof, for trouble is upon me, and no one to help me.*

### **Thursday (Henri Nouwen)**

"Can you drink the cup I shall drink?" pierced my heart like a sharp spear. I knew that taking this moment seriously would radically change our lives. It is the question that has the power to crack open a hardened heart and lay bare the tendons of the spiritual life. But why should we drink this cup? There is so much pain, so much anguish, so much violence. Wouldn't it be easier to live normal lives with a minimum of pain and a maximum of pleasure? "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" Just letting that question sink in made me feel very uncomfortable. But I knew that I had to start living with it.

### **Scripture (Mark 10:35-39)**

*James and John said to Jesus, "We want you to do us a favour. Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left hand in glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know*

*what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I shall drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I will be baptised?"*  
*They replied, "We can."*

**Friday (Fr. Richard Rohr.)**

The supreme irony of the whole crucifixion scene is this: He who was everything had everything taken away from him. Jesus was nailed to the cross, his arms nailed open. He is the eternal sign of God to humans, yet his arms were nailed open because he said in his life "I love you". When you say this, you give the other power over you: power to destroy you and power to create you. Jesus spoke these words to his creation and we took him at his word. But God says "I love you anyway!" That is God's great act of reconciliation. What hope!

**Scripture (Hebrews 4:15-16, 5:7-9)**

*The high priest we have is not incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin. Let us, then, have no fear in approaching the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace when we are in need of help. During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, with loud cries and with tears, to the one who had the power to save him from death, and, winning a hearing by his reverence, he learnt obedience, Son though he was, through his sufferings; when he had been perfected, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation.*

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