

## **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.***

## *Holy Week*

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

*When the apostles enter Jerusalem with Jesus, all is well and 'going to plan': cheering crowds greeting him as 'the One who comes in the name of the Lord'; when he cleared the Temple and the authorities were powerless, the feeling that he would rule as Messiah would be more certain. On Friday, it was over: executed as a criminal, rejected and ridiculed by all, abandoned by his friends. How could it all go so wrong?*

*Accompanying the apostles not only stops me from rushing to the happy ending of Easter Sunday, but also forces me to ask, 'How was the cross the moment of triumph?' Was it necessary for Jesus to die?*

*Isaiah 50:4-7 marks out the path through Holy Week for Jesus, and gives a clue why others – friends and foe – couldn't walk it with him. The Suffering Servant is being used as an instrument. He is woken to 'listen like a disciple' and offers no resistance. For many years, I assumed this was to the suffering inflicted on him, which fit in with my understanding that somehow it was the pain and death that mattered for our salvation. In my Bible, though (NJB), the punctuation is different: 'The Lord opened my ear and for my part I made no resistance, neither did I turn away'; he does not offer resistance or turn away from listening to what God is saying, even though that leads to suffering. Matthew refers to the events as fulfilling scripture: all through his life, whatever Jesus has done has been in obedience to God's will, (the root of 'obedience' is 'to listen'.) All the other characters, though, resist God's word revealed in Jesus, and this resistance now comes to its conclusion: the crowds who recognise him as Messiah on Sunday choose Barabbas, choosing the violence they are familiar with to the new 'Love' message of Jesus; Peter goes from being completely confident that he would stick by Jesus, even die for him, to denying vehemently that he even knew Jesus, because his (very understandable) fear meant he couldn't accompany Jesus along the way; 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, (it turns out he didn't think it would lead to the cross, Mt 27:3); and can I easily condemn the authorities? They are the experts, responsible for defending and handing on the faith, and yet Jesus attacks the very heart of their beliefs in disrupting the Temple and preaching publicly and persistently that they are hypocrites and not to be trusted. The actions of all these characters can't be dismissed as 'they were bad'; they weren't listening openly to what God was revealing. Only Jesus listened and followed God's path of uncompromising love – in the desert, all along the road to Gethsemane three years later, where his, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass me by' seems to me to be the desperate prayer of a man, looking for alternatives, but following it with 'Your will, not mine.' As we see with Peter and the crowds after the Resurrection, forgiveness is freely offered, and with it, freedom from our short-sighted, limited lives that won't let us listen to God. This, I think, is what being 'saved from our sins' means, the sins which Jesus would not allow to influence him, though he lived our humanity, (carried our sins) fully open to God even when we rejected him and put him on the cross, which was the only way through to the Resurrection and the new Covenant in which we are 'saved from our sins'. My focus should be on the cross, and the faith which led to it. 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.*

### **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."*