



Bringing Home the Word



Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

March 29, 2015

Barabbas Speaks

By Janel Esker

I felt like Pilate was joking when he called for my release. Was the crowd really asking for me—a convicted murderer—to be released instead of that seemingly insignificant Jesus? I didn't believe it until my shackles were undone and the rowdy crowd was slapping my back in celebration.

Sunday Readings

Mark 11:1–10 (Procession)

Nearing Jerusalem, Jesus directs two apostles to obtain a colt. Jesus rides it into town. Crowds welcome him, cheer, and spread their coats and palms.

Isaiah 50:4–7

The prophet praises God for the gifts of motivating speech, obedience, and humility. In his perseverance and persecution, God's love and mercy are made manifest.

Philippians 2:6–11

Jesus emptied himself on the cross, willingly accepting the suffering, shame, and pain of his death.

Mark 14:1–15:47

Jesus institutes the Eucharist. Judas betrays him, and Peter denies him thrice. Jesus is accused, condemned, crucified, and buried.

What I remember most is how he looked at me. The crowds were shouting, "Crucify him!" It was terrifying. But Jesus didn't look at me with anger or hatred. The tenderness in his eyes astounded me—took my breath away, really. For a moment, I felt he could see all the horrible things I'd done...and yet he loved me. It's hard to explain and probably sounds ridiculous. But it felt very real.

I was swept up with everyone following Jesus to his crucifixion. Part of me wanted to shout, "Stop! This man is going to die! This man was supposed to be *me!*" Yes, the crowd and leaders chose me, but ultimately, Jesus did the choosing. He didn't fight back, despite being innocent. He freely chose this path. It was terrible to watch him suffer and be crucified. Others taunted him, but I averted my eyes. I kept thinking about how he looked at me. I couldn't shake it.

After he died, I hung around, but not too long. His women friends stayed close to the cross, but I was afraid and confused. My buddies wanted to celebrate, but I needed to be alone. I suddenly felt like a different man. That look he gave me, and witnessing his passion—it changed me. I didn't know then where it would lead me, but I knew I was a changed man. †

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do I pour myself out in service to others?
- To whom do I go when I feel humiliated and rejected by others?



Lord, you showed the
depth of your love by
accepting suffering and
death on the cross.

Give me the grace to
follow in your footsteps.

—*Mindful Meditations for Every Day
of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

Radical Humility

By Marlena Doucette

Most Catholics understand and practice humility. We know it's not all about us, so we try to give something back. But souls who achieve a *radical* humility grow truly close to God and experience a complete siphoning off of their wills. Saint John of the Cross explains the process in *Dark Night of the Soul*, as does Saint Teresa of Avila in *The Interior Castle*. These holy people lived centuries ago, but their words still instruct the willing heart today.

Saint John describes how beginners reveal their lack of humility in many ways: making spectacles of themselves; accusing others; refusing guidance; obsessing over rituals, penances, and mortifications; sulking; and confusing their will with God's. God in his wisdom withdraws spiritual comfort in order to challenge the soul and force the beginner to grow in faith. If the soul does not give up on God, St. John says, he or she will progress.

I tried, with difficulty, to experience this profoundly simple love, to cultivate the practice of the presence of God. Could I put God's will before mine occasionally? Sure. Could I do it every day for the rest of my life? Not likely. Desiring God's will more than our own



doesn't come naturally, at least not to me. We want what we want, and when it doesn't work out, we fight or flee, struggle, worry, doubt, hurt, and so on. Radical humility requires us to become indifferent to whatever happens as long as it fulfills God's will.

After some ten years, I had learned that those who love God go beyond the mundane trappings of a spiritual life, chase God to the ends of the earth, and finally trust God completely. Sadly, many others turn away too soon because they don't understand their own suffering. How many would go on if they knew where they were going and how far they had already come? †

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Catholic Calendar: Holy Week

By Rev. William J. Parker, CSsR

Holy Week is the most sacred week of the liturgical year for Christians because we remember what Jesus did for us. Television and film offer vivid—some would say too vivid—portrayals of Jesus' suffering and death. But it seems to me that the point of the passion narratives in the gospels was not to dramatize the suffering but to bring us to silent awe at the extraordinary love shown by Jesus' death. If we were to sanctify a spot where heaven was closest to earth, Calvary would have to be that place!

Contrary to our modern notion that "love will keep us together," I believe the passion and resurrection narratives remind us that love must be a letting go. It is not a logic that we easily accept. Our instinct is to hold the one we love; when the relationship encounters turbulence, we tend to hold on for all we're worth. Yet Holy Week shows us that it should be just the opposite. The passion was not in the pain Jesus endured but in the choice he made to let go of every support he had a right to receive in order to love us to death. We remember this most sacred week in the hope that we might be empowered to do the same. This kind of love is terribly risky; we could lose everything doing what Jesus did. But Holy Week is a prelude to Easter and a reminder that Jesus' instinct was right and that such love leads to new, surprising life. †

WEEKDAY READINGS March 30–April 4

Mon. *Monday of Holy Week: Isaiah 42:1–7 / John 12:1–11*
Tue. *Tuesday of Holy Week: Isaiah 49:1–6 / John 13:21–33, 36–38*
Wed. *Wednesday of Holy Week: Isaiah 50:4–9 / Matthew 26:14–25*
Thu. *Holy Thursday: Exodus 12:1–8, 11–14 / I Corinthians 11:23–26 / John 13:1–15*

Fri. *Good Friday: Isaiah 52:13–53:12 / Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:7–9 / John 18:1–19:42*
Sat. *Holy Saturday (Easter Vigil): Genesis 1:1–2:2 / Genesis 22:1–18 / Exodus 14:15–15:1 / Isaiah 54:5–14 / Isaiah 55:1–11 / Baruch 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ezekiel 36:16–28 / Romans 6:3–11 / Mark 16:1–7*