

PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (C)

6 – 7 APRIL 2019



SUNDAY REFLECTION
CYCLE C READINGS

In Sean O'Casey's play *Juno and the Paycock* the mother faced with the violent death of her son prays: "Sacred Heart of Jesus, take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh." Eric Fromm (*The Heart of Man*) insists that the longer we continue to make the wrong decisions, the more our heart hardens, while the more we make the right decisions the more our heart softens and comes alive. It is no mere accident that the Apostles' Creed highlights the forgiveness of sins as the pre-eminent characteristic of the life of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. For Graham Greene (*The Power and the Glory*): 'When you visualized a man or a woman carefully, you could always begin to feel pity ... When you saw the corners of the eyes, the shape of the mouth, how the hair grew, it was impossible to hate. Hate was just a failure of imagination.'

CYCLE A READINGS 11:30 A.M. MASS

Today's readings touch into the most profound of human mysteries, the mysteries of life and death. To hold a new born child or to see a sick person restored to health is to experience the wonder of life. On the other hand, the unexpected death of a loved one brings unimagined grief and pain. Death brings tears, even anger. Little wonder that 'life' becomes a metaphor for transformation and new beginnings or that 'death' so often signifies deprivation and loss. The Gospel reading is about the death and restoration to life of Lazarus, 'the one whom Jesus loved'. It is the last of the seven 'signs' in John's 'book of signs' that reveal the 'glory' of God. It is the greatest of Jesus' signs. It functions as a catalyst for the events that lead to His death.' ...from that day on they planned to put Him to death' (11:53). It also provides the occasion for Jesus to assert 'I am the resurrection and the life' and to invite assent to that revelation of His identity. It reveals the compassion and tender heart of Jesus who weeps at the grief of Mary His friend and the death of her brother. It also reveals the goodness in the hearts of those 'Jews' who share her grief and who come to faith in Jesus who raises the dead to life. Though the story revolves around the plight of Lazarus, Martha and Mary are the characters who, with Jesus, occupy center stage in the narrative and into whose faith journey we are invited to enter. The women are introduced before Lazarus. Martha and Mary are identified as 'sisters' who live in Bethany. Are they blood 'sisters' or sisters in their love of Jesus, their faith commitment to Him, or both? Lazarus is Mary's sick 'brother'. There is no mention at the outset of His relationship to Martha, though she later claims Him as her 'brother. Might they all be part of a little faith community in Bethany rather than biological siblings? A brief notice alerts the reader to the imminent death of Jesus: 'Mary is the one who anointed Jesus with perfumed oil and wiped His feet with her tears'. The details of that story are yet to be narrated. The reader will later discover that Mary's anointing of Jesus is 'for the day of (His) burial'. As so often in John's Gospel, misunderstanding and irony function to bring the actors in the drama and us as actors in the theatre of Christian life to new levels of faith and understanding.

STEWARDSHIP

C CYCLE READINGS: In today's second reading, St. Paul says, "For His sake I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth." Does my stewardship suggest that I could say the same?

A CYCLE READINGS: When Jesus heard about the illness of His friend, Lazarus, He responded, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Every aspect of our lives – our sufferings as well as our gifts – can, if surrendered to Christ, lead to blessing for ourselves and others.

READINGS FOR PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD 14 APR '19

Lk. 19:28-40 The Blessing of Palms: With the triumphal entry of Christ, we have the age-old conflict between human expectations and the divine plan.

Is. 50:4-7: The servant of God places his trust in the Lord and knows that he is lovingly protected from the insults and spittle so that he can endure all suffering with patience.

Phil. 2:6-11: Like the seed that is buried in the soil and brings forth new life, Jesus reveals that it is only by dying that we rise to new life.

Lk. 22:14-23 The Passion: St. Luke reveals the compassionate promise of Jesus to the good thief: “today you will be with Me in paradise”.

WEEKDAY REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

MONDAY 8 APRIL

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

After the crowd shows their unwillingness to stone the adulterous woman, today’s Gospel scene might seem over. The final words exchanged in the Gospel between Jesus and her would seem to be simply a wrapping up of the story. Yet in these last words, we see the heart of the Gospel revealed to us. We should see ourselves as this woman.

At first glance, it would seem that Jesus’ refusal to condemn the woman means that He approved of her actions, or at least that her actions were not something to worried about. However, in sending her forth. Jesus tells her that what she has done is indeed a sin, one which she must avoid in the future.

Jesus refuses to condemn her in the midst of her life. To put it somewhat flippantly, condemning another human being is sending someone to Hell before his time. Certainly the woman’s sin is something that deserves eternal punishment, but Jesus refuses to equate the woman and her sin. It is not sin along which condemns a person to eternal punishment: a person must also persist in holding onto that sin, refusing to see it as sinful, and refusing to embrace God’s grace instead of sin. As long as a persons till has a day to live on this earth – even a moment – he still has the chance to recognize his sinfulness, to turn to God in sorrow, and to ask for mercy.

TUESDAY 9 APRIL

“...whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he lives.”

Today’s First reading is proclaimed each year on September 14, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This passage from Numbers, then, setting before us the Israelites in their sinfulness during the Exodus, foreshadows us as sinners during Lent.

The pole on which Moses mounts the bronze serpent foreshadows the Cross. More importantly, the bronze serpent foreshadows Jesus crucified. This latter connection might seem hard to grasp, or even cruel to say regarding our Savior. But we need to remember what St. Paul teaches us about Jesus in his second letter to the Corinthians, as we heard at Holy Mass on Ash Wednesday: “For our sake (the Father) made Him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

However, in every Old Testament foreshadowing of the New, there is something vital lacking. Here, “the children of Israel” recognize that it’s because of their sins that serpents bit many, bringing death. The bronze serpent brings healing to them, but does not take away their sins, or rescue those who have already died. In this, the bronze serpent brings only further life in

this world. It does not, as Christ crucified does, bring forgiveness of sins, resurrection from the death of mortal sin, or life in the world to come.

WEDNESDAY 10 APRIL

“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

The truth that Jesus speaks about here is Jesus Himself. Elsewhere in St. John’s Gospel account, He says of Himself: “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.” But this truth is so powerful – its light is so bright – that it shines everywhere, including upon the lives of us poor sinners. Sinners flee from the truth, because the light of truth exposes their sins for what they are. But if we could only offer our sins to Jesus, He would take them upon Himself, and we could approach the Truth who is Jesus is purity of heart.

Remember what will happen upon Mount Calvary next Friday. From the Cross, Jesus will silently defend a guilty human race from a just punishment: the punishment of eternal damnation. He will defend us by taking our place, and by offering His Body and Blood, soul and divinity, for the forgiveness of all mankind. He will become sin, so that from within, He might transform sin and death through the power of divine love.

When you see an image of the Sacred Heart, you see an antidote for the culture that surrounds us. Jesus points only to Himself, to the innocent Lamb who was slain. He points to His own Sacred Heart. He invites us – most especially through the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Holy Mass – to enter into this love: a love which shows mercy to the guilty, and forgiveness to those without hope.

THURSDAY 11 APRIL

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM”

Many Scriptural studies in recent years have focused on the notion of “covenant” as a key to interpreting the whole of the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord makes covenants with several figures, including Abram. In today’s First Reading God changes Abram’s name to “Abraham” as a reflection of their covenant.

The name “Abraham” literally signifies that God is making him “the father of a host of nations”. Their covenant also concerns “the whole land of Canaan” which the Lord gives “as a permanent possession” of that “host of nations”. The Lord promises to maintain this covenant “throughout the ages as an everlasting pact”. Yet for their part, Abraham and his descendants also must keep the Lord’s “covenant throughout the ages.”

We might ask how Jesus would have thought of this covenant in light of His own mission. At the beginning of today’s Gospel passage, “Jesus said to the Jews: ‘...whichever keeps my word will never see death.’” Interpret these words in light of the Lord’s covenant with Abraham. Abraham’s name signifies his endurance through his progeny. Yet in the Christian’s covenant with Jesus, it’s not one progeny but oneself who perdures by never seeing death.

FRIDAY 12 APRIL

“You, a man, are making yourself God.”

It was the humble, ordinary citizens with little to lose who by simple faith and “common sense” accepted Jesus. John the Baptist’s witness, coupled with Christ’s many signs and wonders, convinced them of the truth of Jesus’ claims.

Humility is the single most important attribute in opening human hearts and minds to God. We receive from God to the degree that we relinquish our very selves.

It is ironic that the Pharisees’ argument against Jesus is the following: “You, a man, are making yourself God.” This lies at the root of the charges that will lead Jesus to His Passion and Death. It is not, of course, Jesus who “made” Himself God: rather, from eternity, God the Son was begotten by the Father. This same Father gave Jesus His mission in this world. In rejecting both who Jesus is, and His mission, the Pharisees reject God the Father as well.

Adding to the irony of the Pharisees’ charge is that human sin – whose power God the Son came into this world to destroy – is based precisely on what they charge Jesus with doing: making oneself into a god. From Adam and Eve to your own sins, every human sinner makes himself an arbiter of truth, and of the meaning of life. Instead, God calls each of us to turn humbly to the Father each day.

SATURDAY 13 APRIL

...he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation...

In today’s Gospel passage, the chief priests and Pharisees express their worry about how Jesus might hurt their standing. They say, “What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs.”

Their chief complaint about Jesus is that He’s able to perform signs that threaten them. The ironic point is that in this, the chief priests and Pharisees are like most of the crowds who watch and listen to Jesus. The crowds, in large measure, follow Jesus because of the signs He performs.

Both His enemies and His followers see Jesus’ signs in relation to themselves. His enemies see His signs as leading to their losing power. His followers see His signs as leading to their gaining food and healing.

Yet neither group considers what the signs are pointing to. For this reason, it’s easy to see why, atop Calvary on Good Friday, His followers are not to be found, and His enemies jeer that His signs have come to an end. “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” (Mk. 15:31-32). Here is a further irony: both friend and foe fail to see the power of the Sign of the Cross. The Cross bears the power to bring strength to His enemies in the form of forgiveness, and nourishment and healing of soul to those who will follow Him in taking up their own crosses.

PASSIONTIDE:

The joy of Easter is almost here, but before that we must accompany Jesus in his Passion.

Traditionally the final two weeks of Lent in the Roman Rite are used as an immediate preparation for the sorrowful events of the Easter drama. It is a period of time to focus more and more on the Passion and death of Jesus and so accompany Him on His way to Calvary.

For several centuries the Fifth Sunday of Lent (this Sunday) was known as “Passion Sunday” and marked the beginning of a special sub-season called Passiontide, which extended up until Holy

Saturday. During this time the Church's liturgy became more somber and a sorrowful mood was reflected in the various practices that occurred in the liturgy.

The most obvious example of a more somber mood was the veiling of statues and images, which remains an optional practice in the current *Roman Missal*: "In the Dioceses of the United States, the practice of covering crosses and images throughout the church from the fifth Sunday of Lent may be observed. Crosses remain covered until the end of the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil."

It was also on the Friday of this initial "Passion Week" that the feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary was celebrated (it is now fixed annually on September 15). The current *Roman Missal* still provides an alternative prayer for that day (Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent), remembering Mary's own bitter passion.

*O God, who in this season
give your Church the grace
to imitate devoutly the Blessed Virgin Mary
in contemplating the Passion of Christ,
grant, we pray, through her intercession,
that we may cling more firmly each day
to your Only Begotten Son
and come at last to the fullness of his grace.*

Palm Sunday was seen as the "Second Sunday in Passiontide," and is currently listed in the liturgical calendar as "Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion." It is on this day that the Passion narrative is read, the longest Sunday Gospel reading of the entire year. The Church beckons us on Palm Sunday to look toward the cross and see Christ's immense love for us, sacrificing Himself for our sins. It is a preview of what is to come on Good Friday.

After Palm Sunday, Passion Week gives way to Holy Week and the Church follows Jesus during His final days in Jerusalem. The Passion narrative was traditionally proclaimed during Mass on each day of Holy Week leading up to Holy Thursday.

Wednesday during this week is known as "Spy Wednesday" and signified the day on which Judas betrayed Jesus and informed the Sanhedrin of his plan.

Various other practices occurred during these final two weeks of Lent, such as Stations of the Cross and the Tenebrae services. In the end, Passiontide is meant to be a special penitential period where we focus on Jesus' bitter passion and foster within ourselves sorrow for our sins. The good news is that Passiontide does not have the last say, and this somber period of preparation ends quickly so that our hearts can rejoice in the beauty of Christ's resurrection.

VEILING CROSSES AND IMAGES DURING PASSIONTIDE

As you enter the church this weekend it is quite obvious that there has been a change. The crosses, statues and pictures excluding the Stations of the Cross have been covered in purple or red cloth. It seems strange that during the most sacred time of year Catholics cover everything that is beautiful in their churches, even the crucifix. Shouldn't we be looking at the painful scene at Calvary while we listen to the Passion narrative on Palm Sunday?

While it may appear counterintuitive to veil statues and images during the final weeks of Lent, the Catholic Church recommends this practice to heighten our senses and build within us a longing for Easter Sunday. The rubrics can guide us. In the *Roman Missal* we find the instruction, “In the Dioceses of the United States, the practice of covering crosses and images throughout the church from [the fifth] Sunday [of Lent] may be observed. Crosses remain covered until the end of the Celebration of the Lord’s Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.”

This is the current practice of the Church, but veiling from the Fifth Sunday of Lent onward is miniscule compared to what was once practiced. For example, in Germany there was a tradition to veil the altar from view throughout all of Lent.

Why go through such lengths to cover up images that are designed to raise our hearts and minds toward heaven?

First of all, we use veils to alert us of the special time that we are in. When we walk into church and notice everything is covered, we immediately know that something is different. These last two weeks of Lent are meant to be a time of immediate preparation for the Sacred Triduum and these veils are a forceful reminder to get ready.

Secondly, the veils focus our attention on the words being said at Mass. When we listen to the Passion narrative, our senses are allowed to focus on the striking words from the Gospel and truly enter into the scene.

Third, the Church uses veils to produce a heightened sense of anticipation for Easter Sunday. This is further actualized when you attend daily Mass and see the veils each day. You don’t want them to be there because they are hiding some very beautiful images.

And therein lies the whole point: the veils are not meant to be there forever. The images need to be unveiled; it is unnatural for them to be covered.

The unveiling before the Easter Vigil is a great reminder of our own life on earth. We live in a “veiled” world, in exile from our true home. It is only through our own death that the veil is lifted and we are finally able to see the beauty of everything in our lives.

PRAYERS

The Passion Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus,
by Your Passion and Resurrection
You brought life to the world.
But the glory of the Resurrection
came only after the sufferings of the Passion.
You laid down Your life willingly
and gave up everything for us.
Your body was broken and fastened to a Cross,
Your clothing became the prize of soldiers,
your blood ebbed slowly but surely away,
and Your Mother was entrusted to the beloved disciple.
Stretched out on the Cross,
deprived of all earthly possessions and human aid,
You cried out to Your Father that the end had come.

You had accomplished the work given You,
 and You committed into His hands,
 as a perfect gift,
 the little life that remained to You.
 Lord, teach me to accept all afflictions
 after the example You have given.
 Let me place my death in Yours
 and my weakness in Your abandonment,
 Take hold of me with Your love,
 that same foolish love that knew no limits,
 and let me offer myself to the Father
 with You so that I may rise with You to eternal life. Amen.

PASTOR'S UP-COMING SCHEDULE

Saturday 6 April	Mass 8:30 a.m. Confessions 1;30 – 4:30 p.m. Vigil Mass 5 th Sunday of Lent 5:00 p.m.
Sunday 7 April	5th Sunday Lent Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. Scrutiny III, 5:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m. Brig
Monday 8 Apr	Priest's Day Off Mass 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Confessions between the Masses Brig 7:40 p.m.
Tuesday 9 Apr	Mass 6:30 a.m. Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Mass 8:30 a.m. Mass St. Brides Correctional Facility 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday 10 Apr	Mass 6:30 a.m. Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Mass 8:30 a.m. Mass PCRS 10:00 a.m. Confessions to follow up to 3:00 p.m. Indian Creek Correctional Facility 5:30 p.m.
Thursday 11 Apr	Mass 6:30 a.m. Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Mass 8:30 a.m. Confessions 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Mass 6:30 p.m. Lenten Lessons 7:00 p.m.
Friday 12 Apr	Mass 6:30 a.m. Confessions 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Mass 8:30 a.m. Adoration 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Stations of the Cross and Benediction 7:00 p.m.
Saturday 13 Apr	Mass 8:30 a.m.

Rehearsal for RCIA

Rehearsal for Altar Servers for Triduum services

Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Vigil Mass Passion/Palm Sunday 5:00 p.m. Blessing and distribution of palm

Sunday 14 Apr

Passion/Palm Sunday

Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m. Blessing and distribution of palm at all Masses. 11:30 a.m. Mass will include the formal blessing and procession into the church from the Bell Tower and Portico

Brig 7:00 p.m.

HOLY WEEK

Monday 15 Apr

6:30 a.m. Mass

7 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions

8:30 a.m. Mass

Brig 7:40 p.m.

Tuesday 16 Apr

6:30 a.m. Mass

7-8:30 a.m. Confessions

8:30 a.m. Mass

Wednesday 17 Apr

6:30 a.m. Mass

7-8:30 a.m. Confessions

8:30 a.m. Mass

HOLY THURSDAY 18 Apr

7:00 p.m. Mass

11:30 p.m. Compline

Good Friday 19 Apr

Morning Prayer 8:30 a.m.

Tre Orie 12 Noon – 3:00 p.m.

Stations of the Cross 3:00 p.m.

Communion Service and Veneration of the Cross 7:00 p.m.

Compline 11:30 p.m.

Holy Saturday 20 Apr

Morning Prayer 8:30 a.m.

Blessing of Baskets 12 Noon

Egg Hunt 1:00 p.m.

Vigil Mass of Easter 8:00 p.m.