

Reflections

Connecting the True Word to Real Life

Holy Week: April 14-20, 2019



A Word of Introduction

Ready or not, Holy Week is here. The reflections below are based on the Revised Common Lectionary- a collection of scripture readings designed to take churches through the broad sweep of scripture over the course of three years. This week there are readings assigned to each day during Holy Week. Our reflections will focus on the Gospel readings for each day. If you'd like to read all of them, you can find them online here:

<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php?year=C&season=Holy%20Week>

Passages for the Week

John 12:1-11, John 12:20-36, John 13:21-32, John 13:1-17, 31b-35, John 18:1-19:38-42

Prayers for the Week:

This week we will share a prayer for every day of the week. Each of them is adapted from the prayer collection: "Revised Common Lectionary Prayers"

Holy Week Happenings

Throughout centuries of Christian tradition, believers have marked the days leading up to Jesus' Crucifixion with special observances.

Palm Sunday

This Sunday at the beginning of Holy Week is a remembrance of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. What happens on Palm Sunday is all mixed up with images of Jewish Nationalism and expectations about the coming Messiah. The Parade with Jesus riding a donkey and the palm waving and the shouting of "Hosanna" ("Save Now!") is all tied in to that expectation. The cheering crowds that greeted Jesus Sunday would be shouting an entirely different refrain by Friday. (see Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11 or Luke 19:28-40)

Maundy Thursday

This day, also called Holy Thursday, remembers Jesus' last supper with his disciples. It is often celebrated with a Christian version of a Passover Seder, foot washing services, Communion or a service of Tenebrae.

Tenebrae Service

Tenebrae is a service that meditates on the Passion of Jesus which dates to the 12th century. The word "tenebrae" means "darkness" or "shadows" and remembers the lengthening darkness that overshadowed the events of Jesus' crucifixion.

Prayer Vigil

A prayer vigil is a way to keep watch with Christ our Lord as we remember God's saving work throughout history. Vigils may be kept for any length of time, but one traditional time for an Easter vigil is from sunset the Saturday before Easter Sunday until Dawn on Easter Day. As part of keeping vigil the story of salvation history as recorded in the Bible is often read or shared aloud. Sometimes these services also feature midnight baptism of newly professing Christian believers.

Good Friday

The traditional name for the day Jesus died on the cross leaves us wondering what could be good about such a day. Only the reality of God's grace redeems such an event revealing in it how the sacrifice of one for the many offers God's love to all of us and makes it "good". Find the story of the passion of the Christ in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23 and John 18-19

Stations of the Cross

One way of remembering the Lord's Passion is to walk the journey to Calvary using a devotional practice called the "Stations of the Cross". There are 14 Stations of the Cross, each marking a Biblical or traditional story about Christ's journey along the "Way of Suffering" (Via Dolorosa). This path is marked in the City of Jerusalem so pilgrims can travel it. It also finds its way into churches, chapels, retreat centers and outdoor settings around the world. By looking online you can find several prayer and devotional guides that lead a person through the Stations of the Cross. One such guide can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/stations-of-the-cross/scriptural-stations-of-the-cross.cfm> Many more can be found on the internet.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday has been called the darkest day of the Christian year. Traditionally, it is a time when people contemplate Christ in the tomb and the meaning of his sacrificial giving of his life for our sake. In Orthodox churches laurel leaves and flowers are scattered on the floor of the church to symbolize the broken gates of hell and shattered chains of death. Often the prayers and hymns for the day serve as a sort of funeral service for Jesus. The observance of Holy Saturday traditionally ends at midnight. You can find readings for Holy Saturday here: <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=130>

This prayer from a book of prayers from the Revised Common Lectionary might help open you to experience the meaning of this day:

Christ our God,
your love is poured out in death for our sakes.
Hold us in your embrace
as we wait for Easter's dawn.
Comfort us with the promise that no power on earth, not even death itself,
can separate us from your love;

and strengthen us to wait
until you are revealed to us
in all your risen glory. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Day One: Monday, April 15

Broken and Spilled Out - Read John 12:1-11.

-This passage was one we encountered a couple weeks ago. This whole notion of being broken and spilled out has stuck with me since then. A lyric from an old Steve Green song echoes in my soul:

"Broken and spilled out
Just for love of you Jesus
My most precious treasure
Lavished on Thee
Broken and spilled out
And poured at Your feet
In sweet abandon
Let me be spilled out
And used up for Thee"

I like the sentiment and have found myself humming the song of late. I'm not so sure that I appreciate the sentiment enough to fully embrace its implications. What might it mean for you to be broken and spilled out for the love of Jesus? Do you have reservations about this? What blessing might you receive if you allowed yourself to be used in this way?

Prayer for the Day

God of steadfast love,
light of the blind and liberator of the oppressed,
we see your holy purpose in the tender compassion of Jesus,
who calls us into new and living friendship with you.
May we, who take shelter in the shadow of your wings,
be filled with the grace of his tender caring;
may we, who stumble in selfish darkness,
see your glory in the light of his self-giving.
We ask this through him whose suffering is victorious,
Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Day Two: Tuesday, April 16

Unless a Grain of Wheat Falls into the Earth - Read John 12:20-36.

-The appearance of the Greeks asking to see Jesus is a turning point in John's gospel. It's almost as if their interest serves as an indication to Jesus that his mission has been accomplished. Why do you think this is?

-What do you make of the metaphor "unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies... (John 12:24)". Is this only applicable to Jesus and his life or does it apply to all who would follow Christ? If you think it applies more broadly does it imply that literal death is required to produce fruit or is there some level of commitment short of that which would be fruitful?

-An old hymn implores the faithful to, " Lift Him up, Lift Him up, Still He speaks from eternity: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, Will draw the world unto Me", what does it mean to lift Jesus up today? What did it mean in the context of the scripture reading for today?

Prayer for the Day

Holy and immortal God,
from earliest times
you have named us
and called us into discipleship.
Teach us to follow the One
whose light scatters the darkness of our world,
that we may walk as children of the light. Amen.

Day Three: Wednesday, April 17

One of You Will Betray Me - Read John 13:21-32

-Unlike the other Gospel writers, John is quite clear about identifying Judas as Jesus' betrayer. It is written that at the moment Jesus hands him the bread the devil enters Judas. Therefore, a claim might be made that the devil made Judas do it. Do you think this is true? Is there any way Judas could have resisted?

-Peter's question to Jesus indicates that there is a possibility that anyone seated at the table with Jesus was capable of betraying him. Do you think Jesus' followers are still capable of betrayal? If so, what form might it take today? How does a person guard against it?

Prayer for the Day

Troubled God,
in every generation
you call your people to contend
against the brutality of sin and betrayal.
Keep us steadfast even in our fear and uncertainty,
that we may follow where Jesus has led the way. Amen.

Day Four: Maundy Thursday, April 18

Maundy Thursday

This day, also called Holy Thursday, remembers Jesus last supper with his disciples. They are gathered to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover– a celebration that remembers how God finally set the people of Israel free from slavery in Egypt by causing a plague upon the first born to “pass over” the homes of the Jews who had marked their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. The feast anticipates God’s salvation coming in the person of a Messiah, a chosen one who will set all things right in the world. It was on this holy night that Jesus instituted the practice of foot washing and the sacrament of communion as ways his followers might continue to remember him after he was gone from their sight. The confusing name, “Maundy Thursday” comes from the Latin phrase, *mandatum novum*, which is a reference to the “new commandment” (John 13:34) Jesus gives his disciples in John’s wordy retelling of the Last Supper (John, chapters 13-17). Other retellings of the events of Maundy Thursday can be found in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22.

A New Commandment - Read John 13:1-17, 31b-35.

-In a world where it is considered a mark of success when a student exceeds the position of a teacher, mentor or parent why does Jesus insist that a student is not greater than the teacher? Do you think there are ways that Christians today have gotten beyond the teachings and example of Jesus to practice something other than his way of being faithful? What kind of things would you identify? Can we return to something closer to the practice that Jesus modeled? Is that even possible in a world that seems much more complicated and diverse? What essential step do you think we should take to get back on track?

Prayer for the Day

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal
your son established a new covenant for all people,
and in the washing of feet
he showed us the dignity of service.
Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit
these signs of our life in faith
may speak again to our hearts,
feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies. Amen.

Day Five: Friday, April 19

“What is Truth?”- Read John 18:1-19:42

-In the face of Governor Pilate’s questioning, Jesus reveals that his kingdom is not of this world. He also says that those who belong to the truth listen to his voice. What do you hear in his voice

on this Good Friday? What message do you find revealed in his cross? What is its essential truth? What is the response you feel led to make, if any?

Prayer for the Day

Grieving God,
on the cross
your Son embraced death
even as he had embraced life:
faithfully and with good courage.
Grant that we who have been
born out of his wounded side
may hold fast to our faith in him exalted
and may find mercy in all times of need. Amen.

Responding to the Word

Why did Jesus die? What sense do you have that he died for you? How far would you go in following his example? This week, go as far as you are able.