



Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion | March 25, 2018

A Story Worth Singing About

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Traditions help us order the world and mark the passing of time. As my children grew up, we marked our entry into the Christmas season by decorating the Christmas tree, reading the Dylan Thomas classic *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, and singing the choral parts of Handel's *Messiah*.

Most people are familiar with Handel's masterpiece, but not everyone knows it was composed as an oratorio for Easter, not Christmas. If we listen to the whole thing, we hear the familiar prophecies of Isaiah and Paul's triumphant cry, "O Death, where is thy sting?" The glorious "Hallelujah Chorus" announces the triumphant reign of the risen Christ.

Every year on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, for much longer than our traditions have held sway, the Church has told the story of the passion and death of Jesus. This story marks our entrance into the faith of the Church and orders our sacred time.

It's the story of a death that leads to life—both the resurrected life of Jesus, which we celebrate next week, and the eternal life that's ours if we follow him.

In Mark's telling of the story, we encounter the woman who anointed Jesus and the young man who ran away when Jesus was arrested.

Each Gospel writer gives us a slightly different version of the story, and each writer adds to our perspective and our understanding that this man and this death weren't like any other. This Jesus was God, who emptied himself so we might live.

Surely that's worth singing about. +

A Word From Pope Francis

Jerusalem, of course, means "city of peace." This is what God wills it to be....Yet sadly Jerusalem remains deeply troubled as a result of long-standing conflicts....May efforts and energies be increasingly directed to the pursuit of a just and lasting solution to the conflicts which have caused so much suffering.

—Welcoming ceremony,
visit to Tel Aviv,
May 25, 2014



Sunday Readings

Mark 11:1–10 or John 12:12–16

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Isaiah 50:4–7

I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Philippians 2:6–11

[Jesus became] obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

**Mark 14:1—15:47 or
Mark 15:1–39**

[Jesus cried...] "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I value the infinite mercy of Jesus, who forgives me whenever I turn to him sincerely?
- In order to love with greater peace, what do I need to accept or embrace?



Why Do Catholics...?

By Thomas H. Groome

There are Catholic practices that can seem strange to people of other faiths. We may

sometimes need reminding about why we do certain things. Three old favorites: Why do Catholics pray to the saints, pray for the souls of the dead, and confess sins to a priest? All three practices reflect the communal understanding that we have of our Christian faith.

Praying to the saints: From their earliest days, Christians have been convinced that baptism bonds us into the body of Christ and that this bond is never broken—not even by death. Further, baptism unites us with the dying and rising of Christ, the paschal mystery that promises new life for all. In this resurrection faith, death is simply a transition. For the dead, life is changed, not ended.

The saints have entered into Jesus' new life in God's presence, yet they remain bonded with us. Much as we would ask a living person to pray for us, we can ask the saints likewise. Strictly speaking, we don't pray *to* saints as if they can answer our prayers; only God can do so. Instead, we ask them to pray *with* and *for* us.

Of course, Mary rightly holds pride of place in the communion of saints. We presume that, like all children, Jesus had

special affection for his mother. If Mary prays for us, how can Jesus decline his own mother?

“Those Who Have Gone Before Us”

Praying for the souls of the departed:

The first Christians began the practice of praying for “those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith.” They knew the challenge of discipleship and how easy it is to fall short. Yet they were also confident in God's mercy, augmented by the saving work of Jesus. So, for those who might not be quite ready, they intuited that God provides an intermediate state of purgation between death and final judgment.

The living can intercede for the departed souls. We can pray for them; do an act of mercy, love, or justice on their behalf; and somehow our efforts can work to prepare them for God's eternal presence. A favorite Catholic practice is to have Mass celebrated for their “eternal rest.”

Confessing to a priest: Again, our communal faith is key to why we confess to a priest in the sacrament of reconciliation. The Bible teaches that every sin hurts the community, if only to diminish the holiness of the people of God. Thus, the rituals of repentance throughout the Hebrew Scriptures are

communal events, with all as a people admitting their sinfulness and asking for God's mercy.

Four Key Steps

As when we apologize for offending another person, repentance always requires that we 1) admit fault, 2) say we are sorry, 3) ask forgiveness, and 4) resolve to make amends to the aggrieved person. The sacrament of reconciliation has taken different forms over its history but has always required these four steps. For many centuries the admission of sins had to be done before the whole community. Eventually this was done in private to a priest who was sworn to secrecy.

Strictly speaking, we confess to God. The priest, acting in the person of Christ and in the name of the community, assures us of God's forgiveness. He says, “Through the ministry of the Church, may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” With gratitude, the penitent says, “Amen.” What a gift! +


Three common Catholic practices that people wonder about reflect the communal understanding that we have of our Christian faith.

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 26–31, 2018

Monday of Holy Week: Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11
Tuesday of Holy Week: Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38
Wednesday of Holy Week: Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25
Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8, 11–14 / 1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 / Heb 4:14–16; 5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42
Holy Saturday: Gn 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26–31a / Gn 22:1–18 or 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 / Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 / Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 / Rom 6:3–11 / Mk 16:1–7



Lord, you empty yourself out in loving service to all people. Give me a selfless spirit that I may be of service to others.

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