

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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**PALM SUNDAY**

**10th April 2022**

THE GOSPEL TEXT (LUKE 23:26-56) IS ON A SEPARATE PAGE

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

This passage is a very rich one and it would be a mistake to attempt to pray each and every part of it. Almost every phrase has something new: actions, images, symbols, words. When you read the passage, stay with whatever part of it resonates with your own life, but make sure when you pray it that you stay with the passage until you get beyond the violence and the horror to find a good news lesson for you.

A few specific points taken at random are:

1. In this scene of great tragedy, there are people helping others, either reluctantly or with compassion: Simon, the women of Jerusalem, the criminal on the cross, and Jesus himself. Note the differences in the manner in which the help given (as a burden, with sympathy, etc). What has been your experience of helping and being helped?
2. Despite the persecution by the leaders Jesus still shows forgiveness. When have you seen that spirit of forgiveness in yourself or in others? In your experience what is the effect of a forgiving spirit ... or the absence of that spirit?
3. Towards the end there is a ray of light. Jesus says "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit". His relationship with his Father was one of trust, even at a moment like this. What difference has it made to you in times of difficulty or pain to have a relationship of trust with God, or with someone else?

## JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom

Holy Week begins with a dual focus, namely the events of Palm Sunday and the triumphant march of Jesus into Jerusalem and then, by contrast, the story of his passion and death. In year C we read from Luke's account of the passion and it is worth our while noting the differences, as each evangelist highlights different things in order to bring out the meaning of what is taking place.

As in the public ministry of Jesus, so too in his death Luke stresses the themes of forgiveness and prayer. Only in Luke does Jesus pray that his executioners be forgiven and only here is the good thief mentioned. Also in Luke, Jesus dies with a prayer of trust on his lips, thus embodying a teaching he had given many times in his life.

### Reflection

Suffering is part and parcel of being human and while we must readily acknowledge this fact it is also true that we usually do all in our power to avoid it. The readings for today are an invitation to reflect on how the passion of Jesus can change our outlook on suffering. Our Saviour may be seen in these texts as a model of patient endurance and of faithfulness. We are not asked to believe that suffering is good in itself, but to see that good can come out of it and to recognise in Jesus God's solidarity with all those who endure suffering for doing what is right.

## SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand

*"The story is still being lived today. Whenever people of faith decide to confront evil at its source, and do so with inner freedom, Jesus is once more entering Jerusalem." (Michel de Verteuil)*

*Go Deeper*

*Don't miss the opportunity this Holy Week to read Luke's Passion account (22:14-23:56). Take a section each day or choose a character in the story to be with, seeing where it leads you. Yes, it is a long gospel passage, but try not to miss the journey that this narrative and this week offers.*

**TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper**

According to the gospel narrative, those who passed before Jesus crucified on the hill of Golgotha jeered at him and mocking his helplessness said to him “*If you are the Son of God come down from the cross*”. Jesus did not react to the provocation. His answer is a silence charged with mystery. Precisely because he is the Son of God, he remains on the cross even unto death. Some questions are inevitable. How is it possible for a God to be crucified by men? Do we realise what we are saying? What is God doing on a cross? How can a religion based on such an absurd notion of God survive?

A crucified God amounts to a revolution and a scandal that obliges us to revise our ideas of a God whom we supposedly know. A crucified God has neither the appearance nor the characteristics that all religions attribute to the Supreme Being.

A crucified God is not an all-powerful majestic being, unchangeable and happy, a stranger to our sufferings, but a helpless and humiliated God who suffers pain, anguish and even death with us. Faced with the cross, we have to open our minds to a new and amazing understanding of a God incarnate in our suffering who loves us with a love we will never comprehend.

As we look upon the crucified one, we begin to sense that God, in his mysterious depths, is someone who suffers with us. Our miseries move him. Our sufferings affect him. God is not one who lives so to say, untouched by our sorrows, tears and misfortunes. God is there at every crucifixion in this world.

### **JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year B**

The passion story is an occasion to discover (or re-discover) the power of Jesus, how it works and what are its effects, so that we can celebrate it.

The rediscovery will be a true celebration as we experience that Jesus’ way of exercising power – the divine way – is good news for us as individuals and as communities, including the entire human family. It will also be a call to conversion as we become aware of how little this kind of power is known and practiced, even by Jesus’ followers. We will also feel a longing for the coming of God’s kingdom – a new civilization based on this kind of power.

We are led to consciousness of Jesus’ power through *lectio divina*. Meditating on the Bible text we remember with deep gratitude moments when people entered our lives exercising his kind of power; other moments when by God’s grace we have been able to exercise it ourselves, as parents, church ministers, fellow-workers, friends. These moments are for us “seeds of the kingdom.”

Our meditation then moves in one of two directions. We can celebrate great people who, like Jesus, enter freely into that lowly state so that they can exercise his power:

– leaders share their weaknesses with members of their communities.

More often people are brought into that situation – usually against their will – and by their faith they make it an experience of Jesus power:

– parents remain faithful to their children even when they see the children sent to prison, victims of drugs, rejecting their parents’ values;

– spouses maintain their dignity when deserted by their partners;

– we grow in compassion through falling into a sin we thought we had done with.

The good thief is the perfect symbol of this process, and we must enter with deep emotion into his moment of grace. Up to then he was nobody. Now, because Jesus shares his lowly fate, he has his moment in history, he enters into his truth. Jesus thanks him for his faith (how he needed that!) and they enter into paradise together, companions in faith.

We can read the passage from either perspective – that of Jesus or that of the thief. We celebrate times when our failures brought us into communion with those we looked down on; other times when someone we were in awe of shared their story with us and we discovered our own greatness, perhaps for the first time.

### **MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels**

The first generation of believers used the Hebrew Bible to explore what happened to Jesus, especially Isaiah and the Psalms.

The same basic story of the Passion is recounted in all four gospels. However, they differ in sequence, in wording and in detail according to the needs of the audience and the theology of the evangelist. A great deal can be learned from paying attention to the variations on the core account.

- i. Women are important in the gospel of Luke and here he shows the representative group of women of Jerusalem suffering with Jesus.
- ii. Luke underlines strongly the innocence of Jesus.
- iii. The martyrdom of Stephen is very similar. Here, Jesus dies as a prophet martyr.
- iv. This gospel shows Jesus dispensing gifts while going to death himself: *reconciliation* (Pilate and Herod); *consolation* (to the women); *forgiveness* (to his killers); *paradise* (to the good thief); *praise* (the centurion); *repentance* (the crowds). The gifts unwrap Luke’s theology of the cross.
- v. ‘*If you are*’ takes us back to the temptations
- vi. The evangelist often used disreputable people to illustrate the Good News: *here, the good thief*.