

## **Friday (Fr. Richard Rohr.)**

The supreme irony of the whole crucifixion scene is this: He who was everything had everything taken away from him. Jesus was nailed to the cross, his arms nailed open. He is the eternal sign of God to humans, yet his arms were nailed open because he said in his life "I love you". When you say this, you give the other power over you: power to destroy you and power to create you. Jesus spoke these words to his creation and we took him at his word. But God says "I love you anyway!" That is God's great act of reconciliation. What hope!

## **Scripture (Hebrews 4:15-16, 5:7-9)**

*The high priest we have is not incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin. Let us, then, have no fear in approaching the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace when we are in need of help. During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, with loud cries and with tears, to the one who had the power to save him from death, and, winning a hearing by his reverence, he learnt obedience, Son though he was, through his sufferings; when he had been perfected, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation.*

## *Holy Week*

### **The road to the Cross is paved with God's intentions**

*After the triumphant entry and the eviction of the traders from the Temple, it must have seemed to the apostles that Jesus had now reached the point where he would take power and establish the Kingdom of God, as was expected of the Messiah; yet by Friday, their only possible conclusion could be that it had all ended in failure: betrayed by a friend, abandoned by others, executed as a criminal, rejected and ridiculed by all. The danger of knowing the 'happy ending' of Easter is the temptation to minimise just how disastrous this seemed at the time, and so to fail to understand the road to the cross.*

*The essential feature of Jesus' actions is explained in Isaiah 50:4-7 which establishes that the servant is being used as an instrument. In Isaiah, the disciple must first of all experience himself what he is to transmit to others. He is woken to 'listen like a disciple'. In this case, the servant is completely obedient to God, offering no resistance to what he hears. (For many years, I thought he was offering no resistance to the treatment by his opponents). The servant will encounter suffering and be rejected by people, and it is then that he will know that he can put all his trust in God. Having experienced this, he can be a sign of God's saving love to the faithful, and to those who 'walk in darkness'. Jesus' apparent despair on the cross, (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?), is the beginning of psalm 21 which ends in praise of God for rescuing the poor and those who cry for help. In the context of Isaiah, therefore, it is not so much the suffering as the obedience which led to the cross which is the more significant.*

*St. Paul, (Philippians, 2:6-11), is able to look back to the death of Jesus and see that it is the humility and the emptying of himself which allowed God to raise him and so allow all to come to know God through him. This 'assuming the condition of a slave' by Jesus, is the opposite of Adam, who tried to grasp equality with God, and so broke the relationship which would allow God to fulfil his plans in us.*

*Reading Mark's account of the events leading to Jesus' death, it is noticeable how all the characters who reject Jesus see things from their point of view and are unable to 'empty themselves': the crowds who greeted their Messiah on Sunday choose the way of power through violence in Barabbas; Judas, the Zealot, begins his betrayal after Jesus had spoken of his burial, presumably because he could not allow the Messiah to be so passive; the religious leaders and the earthly, (military) powers reject and mock him with an arrogance and cruelty which comes from a conviction that they are doing a good thing in removing Jesus; even the criminals executed with him taunt him.*

*As the events unfold through the week, Jesus is fully aware of the looming crisis. He is alone – emphasised by the sleeping apostles in Gethsemane and by Peter's denials – but he continues to obey. It isn't easy - 'if it is possible, let this cup pass me by' seems to me to be the desperate prayer of a man, looking for alternatives. But the next phrase – 'not my will, but yours' - is the key to understanding the cross and resurrection.*

*Significantly, the only supporters present at the cross who don't reject Jesus are a handful of women followers. Perhaps it was because they are the only ones out of all the characters who have no power, allowing them to be able to watch and accompany him, like disciples. It is perhaps from their vantage point that Holy Week can be a deeply prayerful time. Not analysing, not rushing to the happy ending: listening without resistance and pondering on the faith with which Jesus made his journey. Martin Bennett*

### **Monday (Fr. Austin Smith, CP)**

The suffering and dying of God is regarded as essential to reach the resurrection, to which we can't get quickly enough. But this underpins not a theology of the resurrection but a superficial ideology of hope. Before outlining vast theologies of redemption, indeed before talking about the wonder of the Resurrection we should contemplate the absurdity of the death of Jesus. An open contemplation of the death of Jesus, leading to a mystical union with God, leads us to examine the depth of our assimilation of, and relationship to, the values of Jesus. It often seems that it is only at the death of someone that we come to understand, in any depth, our relationship with them.

### **Scripture (Psalm 42)**

*I thirst for God, the living God; when shall I go to see the face of God? I have no food but tears, day and night, as all day long I am taunted 'Where is your God?' I shall say to God 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go around in mourning, harassed by the enemy?' Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God. Send out your light and your truth, they shall be my guide, to lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.*

### **Tuesday (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)**

When Jesus calls his disciples to follow him, it is closely associated with the prediction of his passion. He must suffer and be rejected. Had he only suffered, Jesus might still have been applauded as the Messiah. All the sympathy and admiration of the world might have been focused on his passion. It could have been viewed as a tragedy with its own intrinsic value, dignity and honour. But in the passion, Jesus is a rejected Messiah. His rejection robs the passion of its halo of glory. Suffering and rejection sum up the whole cross of Jesus. This notion has ceased to be intelligible to a Christianity which can no longer see any difference between an ordinary human life and a life committed to Christ.

### **Scripture (Mt. 27:39-44)**

*The passers-by jeered at him: "So you would destroy the Temple and in three days rebuild it! Then save yourself if you are God's son and come down from the cross!" The chief priests and the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way "He saved others but he cannot save himself. Let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him. He has put his trust in God; now let God rescue him if he wants him" Even the bandits who were with him taunted him in the same way.*

### **Wednesday (Martin Luther)**

'Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge. My comprehension transcends yours. Thus Abraham went forth from his father not knowing where he was going. He trusted himself to my knowledge and cared not for his own, and came to his journey's end. Behold, that is the way of the cross. The road which is clean contrary to all that you choose or desire—that is the road you must take. To that I call you and in that you must be my disciple.'

### **Scripture (Ps. 22 )**

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. The words of my groaning do nothing to save me. My God, I call you by day but you do not answer, at night, but I find no respite. Yet you, the Holy One, in you our ancestors out their trust, they trusted you and you set them free. But I am a worm, not a man, scorn of mankind, contempt of the people; all who see me sneer and wag their heads, 'He trusted himself to Yahweh, let Yahweh set him free!' Do not hold aloof, for trouble is upon me, and no one to help me.*

### **Thursday (Henri Nouwen)**

"Can you drink the cup I shall drink?" pierced my heart like a sharp spear. I knew that taking this moment seriously would radically change our lives. It is the question that has the power to crack open a hardened heart and lay bare the tendons of the spiritual life. But why should we drink this cup? There is so much pain, so much anguish, so much violence. Wouldn't it be easier to live normal lives with a minimum of pain and a maximum of pleasure? "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" Just letting that question sink in made me feel very uncomfortable. But I knew that I had to start living with it.

### **Scripture (Mark 10:35-39)**

*James and John said to Jesus, "We want you to do us a favour. Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left hand in glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I shall drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I will be baptised?" They replied, "We can."*