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Good Friday - 15 April 2022

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15 April 2022

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

Reflection by Russ McDougall

Pastoral Note

Today's liturgy begins simply and in silence, with no introductory rites prior to the opening prayer.

Introduction

Today we continue the great Triduum, the seamless act of remembering. Last night we left without a dismissal, today there is no greeting and we continue the story of our faith as we will leave without a dismissal. We recall today the final hours of Jesus's earthly life.

Collect

Option one

Remember your mercies, O Lord,
and with your eternal protection sanctify your servants,
for whom Christ your Son,
by the shedding of his Blood,
established the Paschal Mystery.

Commentary

This ancient Roman prayer is first found as a collect for a Monday Mass in Holy Week. It is now one of two options for the opening prayer during the celebration of the Lord's Passion. It sets the paschal mystery within the mercy of God, a mercy which is said to offer an eternal protection which not only keeps safe but transforms us in holiness. The focus on Jesus' blood evokes the Passover images of the blood sprinkled on the lintels of the Israelites which protected them from the angel of death (Ex 12:12-21). It also opens onto the glory of the triumphant Lamb in the Book of Revelation. As with the freeing of the Israelites from slavery, the mystery is enacted entirely by God to bring us to salvation. In our case, it is Jesus who passes through death.

Option two

O God, who by the Passion of Christ your Son, our Lord,
abolished the death inherited from ancient sin
by every succeeding generation,
grant that just as, being conformed to him,
we have borne by the law of nature

the image of the man of earth,
so by the sanctification of grace
we may bear the image of the Man of heaven.

Commentary

In the ancient Roman liturgy for Good Friday this prayer was prayed between the readings that preceded the recitation of the Passion. It has a strong Pauline flavour, though a convoluted execution and unnecessary exclusive language. There are a range of strands interwoven. Sin is death, and in his death Christ has overcome these. The first 'Adam' bears the stamp of the earth. However, under the law of grace we are remade in the image of the second Adam and as creatures now bear the stamp of the heavenly. There is a sense in that as Christ was conformed to the law of nature in his incarnation so we through his Passion now seek to be conformed to him in his divinity. It is unclear what reading this prayer accompanied in the ancient sources and remains unfortunate that there is no passage from Paul in the current liturgy.

First Reading

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

In this reading from one of the four Songs of the Servant, we see the power of non-violent resistance to evil. This can awaken the evil doer to a sense of justice.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 30(31):2,6,12-13,15-17,25 Response Luke 23.46

Father, I put my life in your hands.

This poignant psalm on this particular day has to move one's heart and soul. It follows so naturally from the words of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah and prepares us for the reading of the gospel in a deeply moving way.

Second Reading

Hebrews 4:4-16, 5:7-9

The psalm that precedes this reading, Psalm 30, draws us into the heart of the Suffering Servant. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ, through his suffering was made perfect and therefore becomes for us the source of eternal salvation.

Gospel Reading

John 18:1 – 19:42

John's account begins with the events after the Last supper as Jesus is betrayed. It then recounts his encounter with the Roman authorities and how he was deserted by all his followers except his mother, the beloved disciple and some other women. After his death he is laid in a tomb.

Reflection

The question that I raised yesterday about the zero-sum game is really a question about how we understand the redemption—the atonement—that Jesus has accomplished. Thinking this through in light of the Scriptures requires some history, some exegesis. It requires some work, but it's an important question, a crucial question, so I hope you'll bear with me.

Christian tradition, whether we're talking about the Western or the Eastern churches, has to a large extent understood the redemption that Jesus accomplishes as a work of substitution. In the Eastern churches, the substitution is a ransom that Jesus supplies on our behalf. By sinning, human beings basically sold themselves to the devil. Satan, in other words, had possession of us. As the Word-made-flesh, the life of Jesus is worth infinitely more than all other human life put together, so by dying, Jesus paid the ransom that we were incapable of paying on our own. And so he set us free. (Cf. Orthodox icons of the resurrection.)

In the West, theology of the atonement is also largely substitutionary, but more legalistic than in the East. In the West we tend to read the Scriptures through the lenses supplied by Augustine of Canterbury, whose thought on the atonement goes something like this: by our sin, human beings have offended God, whose dignity is infinite. God's infinite justice demands infinite restitution—something that human beings are incapable of supplying. Only a human being who is also divine is capable of offering the necessary restitution. That person is Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross accrues infinite worth, which more than redeems humankind.

There are certainly plenty of passages in the New Testament that would support a theology that understands the atonement as an exchange or substitution in which Jesus takes on the punishment that is our debt, and so sets us free:

- 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Mk 10:45 and parallels)
- 'God made him who knew no sin to be sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor 5:21)
- 'They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' (Rev 7:14)
- 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away [or removes] the sins of the world.' (John 1:29)

The issue, for us, is how to understand these texts in light of mainstream Jewish thought about atonement, because the idea of ‘substitution’ does not predominate, at least at any stage of Jewish history I’m familiar with. A sacrifice doesn’t ‘take away’ my sin. If I wrong my neighbour in some way, the *only* way to achieve reconciliation is to go to my neighbour and try to work things out between us: by asking for forgiveness, possibly making restitution in some way so that the neighbour’s heart is opened up to offering forgiveness to me. A sacrifice doesn’t enter into that process as some sort of exchange or substitution. That’s why Jesus tells his disciples that if they’re on their way to the temple to offer sacrifice and remember that their neighbour has something against them, they should first go and be reconciled with their neighbour.

If I sin against God in some way, then the way of dealing with that is by reforming my life. If I am someone that is constantly breaking the rules of Sabbath observance, for example, what needs to happen is for me to think seriously about what the laws are there for: to create space and time for me to nurture relationship with God, as well as to spend quality time with my family. The only way to ‘take away’ that sin is to remove it from my life by starting to take Sabbath observance seriously.

What the sacrificial cult does accomplish, in Jewish thought, is to remove the defilement that our sins, especially the sins we’re not even aware of, brings upon the land and upon the temple. It doesn’t effect forgiveness. That can happen only in relationship with our neighbour and with God, by admitting wrongdoing and taking concrete steps to reform our lives. The sacrificial meal that is shared by those who offer the sacrifice also serves to build communion: with God, with one another, and with the broader community of Israel represented by the priests.

You may object: Russ, you haven’t listened very closely to our first reading from the prophet Isaiah. Didn’t you hear the prophet’s words?

‘He was pierced for our offences, crushed for our sins;
upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole;
by his stripes we were healed.’

We’d have to settle our dispute by taking a look at what the Hebrew text says:

*hu mecholal mippesha’enu, medukka’ mē’avontēinu;
musar shlomēnu ‘alav, uvachavurato nirpā’ lanu.*

He was pierced, or wounded, *mippesha’enu*—usually translated as ‘for our sins or transgressions.’ But the preposition that’s used is *min*. In Arabic the preposition is the same in both languages, and the basic meaning is ‘from.’ If the meaning were ‘for’ our sins, classical Hebrew would have used the preposition ‘*al*—or possibly *le*—but not *min*. ‘For’ our sins indicates finality, a goal: ‘for our sins’ would mean that the servant’s suffering has some goal with respect to our sins.

But the Hebrew doesn’t use ‘*al*, it uses *min*. *Min* doesn’t indicate finality or goal; it indicates origin, or cause. So what the Hebrew text is saying is not ‘he was pierced

for our transgressions,' but 'he was pierced *because of* our transgressions, crushed *because of* our iniquities.'

So what's going on here in this text?

In this Holy Week all of the four Songs of the Servant from the prophet Isaiah are proclaimed. In the second Song, from Isaiah 49, which was the first reading on Tuesday, the Servant is explicitly identified as the people of Israel: 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.' In the fourth Song, which we've heard today, the servant is seen as someone who is despised, rejected:

'We held him of no account...we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought wholeness to us, and in his bruises there is healing for us.'

Who is the 'we' speaking in the text?

If the servant is to be understood as the people of Israel, the 'we' must be the nations. What the prophet is envisioning is a confession on the part of the nations who have made Israel suffer—through military defeat; through carrying captives off into slavery; through exile. At different points in its history the people of Israel were made to suffer in one way or another by just about all of their neighbours. And what the prophet is capturing in this passage is a moment of compunction, a moment in which some people take notice of the bruises they've inflicted on their neighbour, and they ask themselves: what have we done? What have I done?

In this particular context, the prophet sees the people of Israel as playing a role in pricking the conscience of their neighbours. He sees Israel as playing a role in awakening the conscience of their oppressors to a sense of justice. In effect, he sees Israel's suffering as having the possibility of turning their gentile neighbours around—leading them to repentance, *teshuvah*.

What I'm suggesting is that the prophet's vision in these Songs of the Servant is getting at what Gandhi and Martin Luther King understood as truth-force, the power of non-violent resistance to evil. Both men argued that we have a duty to resist evil, but not by doing harm to evildoers. Speak the truth, they said, but be ready to accept (and absorb) the anger that will come your way, and the possible violence as well, from people who feel threatened by the truth. By refraining from violence, those who practice non-violent resistance to evil leave open the possibility that those they confront may actually be converted, rather than destroyed.

The Songs of the Servant suggest that the people of Israel, through their endurance of suffering, have opened up the possibility that at least some of their neighbours might be awakened to a sense of justice, that their lives might be turned around, in the right direction. And in this way Israel becomes a light to the nations.

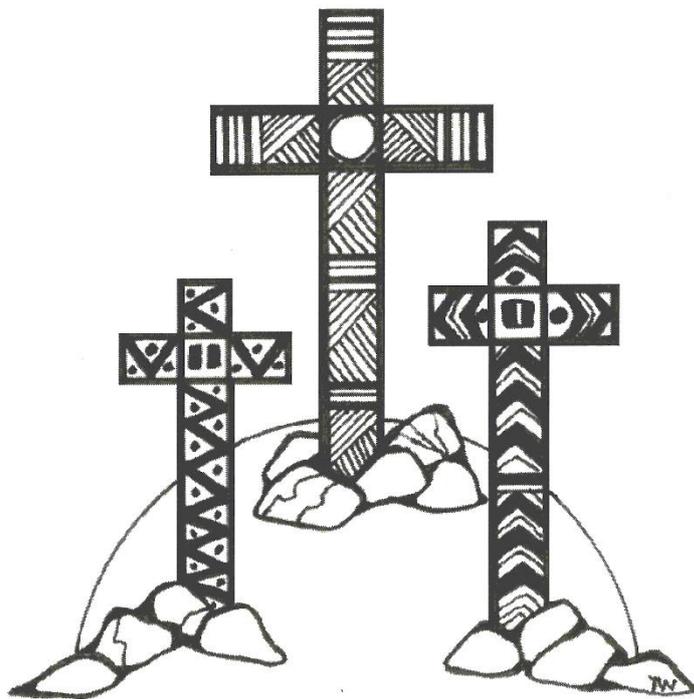
What I would also suggest is that this is the way that God deals with us, in Christ. Our God isn't a monster demanding infinite payment for an infinite debt. Through the use of truth-force, non-violent resistance to evil, God seeks to draw us, through Christ and in the Spirit, into God's own divine life of love. Previously I spoke about

the way the Gospel of John portrays the moving encounters Jesus has with men and women, leading them to the truth, drawing them into friendship with himself, and with God. He's not successful with everyone, as we see with Pilate, who ultimately closes his heart to the truth that stands, incarnate, before him.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away our sins by opening our hearts to the truth and setting us on the right path. Turning to him is just the beginning. As we were reminded in our Lenten journey, those who wish to come after him must take up their cross daily and follow. Jesus has turned our lives around; he invites us now to share in his mission: to engage our neighbours, those whom God sends into our lives, and help to lead them toward the truth, and to living the truth in justice and in love.

Prayer of the Faithful

On Good Friday the prayer of the faithful is replaced by the solemn intercessions from the Roman Missal.



... he became the source of eternal salvation.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Procession of the Cross:

This is the wood of the cross. P Jones. 328

People's Veneration of the Cross:

O my people. D Lundy/ C Walker. 329

Other Hymns for the Liturgy:

Adoramus te, Christe. M Haugen. 305

All you who pass this way. J Berthier. 331

At the cross her station keeping. A Petti/ Mainz Gesangbuch. 332

Behold the wood. D Schutte. 333

Jesus, remember me. J Berthier. 308

O Jesus crucified. J McAuley/ R Connolly. 334

O sacred head, surrounded. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux/ J S Bach. 335

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? African American Spiritual. 336

When I survey the wondrous cross. I Watts/ E Miller. 330

AOV1

Behold the cross. B Hurd. 105

Jesus, remember me. J Berthier. 152

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? African American Spiritual. 103

AOV2

See his hands. S Sears. 48

Veneration of the Cross: Antiphon and response

CWB

Showing the cross. 259

CWBII

Behold, the wood of the Cross. ICEL 319

Behold, behold the wood of the cross. Dan Schutte 320

Songs during veneration

AOVNG

See him. Keith Duke, 108

See his love. Tom Lockley. 109

Song of the cross. Ana DaCosta and Susan Hookong-Taylor. 116

CWB

At the cross her vigil keeping. Jacopone da Todi. 624

My people, my people, Joseph Wise. 750

O Jesus crucified, for us you suffered. James Phillip McAuley. 770

When I survey the wondrous cross. Isaac Watts. 862

CWBII

At the cross her vigil keeping. Jacopone da Todi, tr. Anthony G. Petti. 318

Faithful cross the Saints rely on. Venantius Fortunatus. 321

O Jesus crucified. James Phillip McAuley. 326
The Reproaches. Joseph Wise. 322
The Reproaches. ICEL. 323
When I survey the wondrous cross. Isaac Watts. 329

S&S2

Glory in the cross. Dan Schutte. 313
Wondrous love. Timothy E. Smith. 317

Communion Song

CWB

My loving Saviour, how have you offended. Johann Heermann. 749
O sacred head, surrounded. St Bernard of Clairvaux. 776
Praise to the Holiest in the height. John Henry Newman. 791

CWBII

Jesus, remember me. Taizé Community. 526
My song is love unknown. Samuel Crossman. 325
O sacred head, surrounded. St. Bernard of Clairvaux. 330
Praise to the Holiest in the height. Bl. John Henry Newman. 585
The Lord is now exalted. Pamela D. Stotter. 324
The royal banners forward go. Venantius Fortunatus. 327
Were you there when they crucified my Lord? African-American spiritual. 328

S&S2

O sacred head. St Bernard of Clairvaux/Bob Hurd. 314

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 30: *Father, I put my life in your hands.*
Psalm 30: Douglas Mews. CWB 256
Psalm 31: I put my life in your hands. Rosalie Bonighton. GA 30
Psalm 31 (30): Jenny O'Brien. JOBF pg. 8
Father, I put my life in your hands: Paul Mason. PM pg. 28
Father, Into Your Hands: Marty Haugen. LPSF. Pg. 29

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Look at the cross (TT/SYJ) [Veneration of the Cross]
That we might live (TWML) [Veneration of the Cross]