

Mark 14:32-42 Gethsemane

This Tuesday last was the first day of spring, as well as the last day of winter. It behaved like winter. In a similar way today is both the last day of Lent and the first day of Holy Week. We call it Palm Sunday because of the branches that were used to usher Jesus into Jerusalem when he entered to observe the Passover in the year of his Passion.

Consequently, in the Lectionary there are two liturgies: the Liturgy of the Palms and the Liturgy of the Passion. The question is which way to behave. The texts we have read lead us into Holy Week, namely, to the prayer in Gethsemane on the night of the arrest.

Deep Trouble

After the Passover meal at which Jesus had predicted the betrayal of Judas, and instituted the Lord's Supper, he led his disciples out to the Mt. of Olives. He had a conversation with them in which he predicted their failure. "You will all fall away . . ." he told them. He foresaw the denials of Peter. Then they went to a place called Gethsemane where Olive Oil was produced.

Perhaps the best word to describe this experience is "troubled," The text tells us the Jesus was "deeply troubled." He told Peter and James and John, whom he had called deeper in to Gethsemane, that in his soul he was grieving to the point of death. He kept

asking them to stay awake, which they could not do. He spoke the agonizing words, which adjectives fail to qualify;

"Abba, Father, everything is possible to you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." At the end of the scene the soldiers come with Judas to make the arrest.

By and large, western culture in general, and in particular American is emotionally restrained. Extreme displays of grief and joy are tolerated at best, frowned upon at worst. Many people are like me, maintaining a middle ground that is neither too high or low. We *feel* the deep emotions, but we do not show them if we can avoid it.

To be sure, Jesus was in a private place here, but these were deeply felt emotional expressions, falling to the ground and crying out. He was moved by the events that were about to happen. He knew he would die. He thought it was God's will. He prayed to be delivered from it.

Divine Love

The theology of the Church is that Jesus was fully human, like us in every way except without sin, and also that he was fully divine. Here in Gethsemane he is in the clearest possible way both. What shines through is Love.

Jesus' love for his disciples who can't stay awake and will soon be scattered; his love for God and his resolve to be obedient, and without mentioning it here was a great love for the world and all its people, combines to present to us a human being in the fullest sense and a revealing of God's nature.

It was his love that carried him through this agonizing experience where he asked God to remove the cup and the answer was no, it would not be removed. He listened for a voice like the one he heard at his baptism, "this is my son, whom I love . . .," or at the Transfiguration, but here was silence.

More than anything it is the love which imposes itself upon us, who have benefited so much from this sacrifice. Divine love is different from other kinds of love.

By it we do not mean the same thing we mean when we say we love pizza or ice cream, or music or basketball or great art or literature. With these things, we love them because they make us feel good, they give something to us, asking little if anything in return.

We also don't mean the same thing as when we say we love each other, family, friends, and neighbors. In these cases there is a kind of mutuality. To love a friend can be demanding, calling for expenditures of time and energy and resources. There may even be a willingness to make sacrifices for those we "love" in

this way. but there is also a receiving back. In many cases the relationships will fail for lack of reciprocation.

But here in Gethsemane there is something different. Jesus confronts God's reality, that his love can expect nothing in return, it must be open to the risky possibility that it will not be reciprocated. It is a "giving away" kind of love that holds its breath against the possibility that it will not be returned. And yet he gave.

This expression of God's love is compelling. We are told by the statisticians that on any given Sunday, only about 35% of Christians attend worship. On a monthly basis the percentage is closer to 50%. Those who worship annually, often at Easter, make up closer to more than 80%.

There are all kinds of explanations of these attendance habits, but at least one explanation must be that at Easter the gospel story is always told and even marginal believers are compelled to listen to it, envision it, and at least try to appropriate it into their lives.

The cross is God's love on display. With all of our doctrines about sin and human weakness in tow, we nonetheless face the one great implication that if we have been so loved, we ought also to love:

"Love on another," is the way we find it in the Gospel of John. "Love your neighbor as yourself," comes from

Leviticus and is repeated in both the gospels and the epistles and is attached to the command to love God as the greatest of all commandments. And just so there is no confusion, in the Sermon of the Mount we read, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”

Imperatives

What does it mean to love as we have been loved? Setting aside that we will be frustrated in the attempt by our own sinfulness, requiring our dependence on God for help, it may be said to mean:

- That we will desire the well-being of other people, all other people, without exception.
- That we will seek to do good in every way we can and at every opportunity, meaning that we will do what we know to be right.
- That we will submit to God’s will, repent our sinfulness, consider ourselves forgiven, and be forgiving of others.
- That we will value justice, fairness, truthfulness, peace even if it means we must make personal sacrifices like Jesus did.

- And it means that we will set aside anger, fear, and greed in all our encounters, from the most intimate to the least.
- It means that we will discipline ourselves with God’s help to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus himself,

“Who, being in very nature, God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”

There was no selfish ambition of vain conceit, but the humble acceptance of others as better than himself, looking not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.

Having this attitude is a struggle for us. Here in Gethsemane, we see that it was a struggle for Jesus, a glorious struggle, in which he attained the victory when he ascended the cross. It is through the power of the cross that Jesus helps us in our weakness.

Seek his help, accept his help, live by his example, follow his path and be renewed in mind and spirit, by faith in his Holy Name.

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