

“My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch.”

PASSION AND DEATH OF JESUS

The drama of the saving act of our Lord Jesus begins with joy and ends with sorrow. It is a story written on our hearts and is etched in our own lives. We hear the joy of Jesus' disciples with the “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest.” The disciples don't know of the sorrow and anguish that Jesus will suffer in a few short days in order to bring a deeper joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

That sequence starts with an act of kindness in Bethany, at a dinner gathering, when a woman anoints Jesus with oil from an alabaster jar. This was an act of extravagant expense (costing a year's wages). There were some there who were indignant at the expense which could have been used to relieve the suffering of the poor. Jesus remarked, “leave her alone. She has done a good thing for me. The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them.” This event provoked Judas to start his act of betrayal.

A while later Jesus celebrates the passover meal with his disciples where he gives the gift of himself to all in the institution of the Eucharist. We reflect on the events that follow using the meditations of the sorrowful mysteries on the rosary.

Jesus takes his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane where he wants to pray. He then takes Peter, James and John further on when he in trouble state says to them, “My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch.” Could it be that like our greatest fear, Jesus doesn't want to die alone? But his closest and most trusted friends weren't up to the task, “Simon are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for an hour?”

Then the betrayal by Judas took place and Jesus was arrested. In a show trial he was convicted and condemned to die by crucifixion. Part of that rite consisted of

being scourged at the pillar. An image of that is burned into me by seeing the movie the Passion of the Christ. Joan and I were in Hawaii in 2004 where one day a terrible storm came up. We were in a mall when we were caught up in it and had to seek shelter. It so happened that we were near a movie theater and decided to wait out the storm by taking in a movie. The Passion of the Christ was the movie being shown so we went in, bought some popcorn and drinks and settled in to watch. It was a painful and excruciating experience. The scourging at the pillar was so graphic and relentless that I heard someone say, 'please stop!' It actually could have been me soul crying out. When the movie was over the entire audience left in complete silence. Our popcorn and drinks were untouched and Joan gave them to a homeless person sitting on the floor of the lobby.

For Jesus what come next after the scourging was the crown of thorns. Jesus was forcibly dressed as a king by the Roman soldiers. "they clothed him in purple and weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, 'hail, King of the Jews', and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting on him." This image of Jesus and the mockery is one we always associate with the suffering and humiliation of Jesus. "Yet you and I...haven't we crowned him anew with thorns and struck him and spit on him? (Escriva) But as St. Jerome teaches "His ignominy has blotted out ours, his bonds have set us free, his crown of thorns has won for us the crown of the Kingdom, his wounds have cured us."

Now Jesus is given his cross and starts to carry it to the place of execution. But before long, "They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross." Here St, Mark has paused to identify this Simon and his sons. It appears that years later Rufus as a Christian moved with his mother to Rome; St.Paul sent them affectionate greetings in his letter to the Romans (16:13). When meditating on this passage we might reflect that although our Lord has rescued us, and al-

though his merits are infinite, he does seek our cooperation. Christ bears the burden of the cross, but we have to help him carry it by accepting all the difficulties and contradictions which divine providence presents us with. In this way we grow in our holiness, at the same time atoning for our faults and sins.

The last sorrowful mystery is the crucifixion of our Lord. “They brought him to the place of Golgotha ... Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them ... At noon darkness came over the whole land until 3 in the afternoon.” St. Jerome explains that the darkness is expressing the mourning of the universe at the death of its Creator, nature's protest against the unjust killing of its Lord. “at 3 o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi. Eloi, lema sabachtani - my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.”

Henri Nouwen tells us that much of our pain comes from or experience of not having been loved well. We seek an everlasting love; in the suffering and death of Jesus our Lord we can claim such a love. What we need to do is to live a truly grateful life. If we follow Jesus even to the cross, we can accomplish this. Jesus' suffering was brought upon him by the forces of darkness. Still he speaks about his suffering and death as his way to glory. For us it is very hard to bring our past and present suffering under the light of gratitude. But if we have the courage to look at our life as God sees it, then, following Jesus, our guilt becomes a happy guilt, our shame a happy shame, because they have brought us to a deeper recognition of God's mercy, a stronger conviction of God's guidance, and a more radical commitment to a life in God's service.