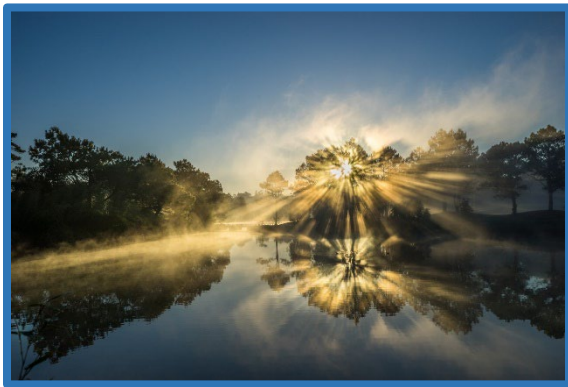


REFLECTIONS FOR PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY ~ 10 April 2020

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Holy week – holy time and holy space. Today we enter Holy Week, a period of seven days which lead us through the passion and death of Jesus into the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. This is a Week so familiar to us that it is easy to take it for granted and simply go through the motions of the rich liturgies.

Holy time – all time is holy, but there are moments in time that are especially precious. Holy Week is a time of seven days with Jesus resting in the grave on Saturday, the seventh day. After that day, Jesus rises from the dead and new life emerges. We reflect that the six days of creation described in the book of Genesis are followed by the seventh day of rest. God rests as the cosmos comes into being and our world emerges. Both the first act of creation and the new creation which emerges with Jesus' death and resurrection are threaded through with the same themes: word, light, water, and living ones.



God's word is spoken simply, "Let there be. . ." and the cosmos (the heavens and Earth) comes into being. In the six days leading to the new creation, Jesus speaks little with his final words, again so simply stated, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), and "It is finished" (Jn 19:29). Light is created from the darkness as God's first act in Genesis; the sun's light fails as Jesus dies (Lk 23:45) and is restored when Jesus rises on the dawn of the Resurrection Day. The Paschal candle is lighted at the Easter Vigil to mark this return of the light.

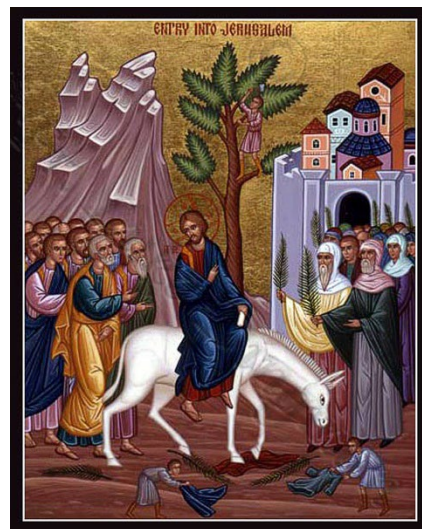
Water is there from the beginning of creation, but it is carefully integrated by God into the creation of the heavens and Earth. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper, a sign of inclusion of all in the communion of all creation. As described in Genesis, life is created, first with the plants and trees, then the fish of the sea and birds of the air, then the animals (wild and domestic) of the land, and then humans. In the Holy Week story, the welcome into Jerusalem is heralded by a colt and palm branches, Jesus changes the bread and wine (fruits of Earth), the cock crows to remind Peter of his denial, Jesus is crowned with thorns, he is nailed to a cross of wood, and he is buried in the tomb protected by the stone. Earth creatures accompany Jesus every moment of the seven days.

God rests on the Sabbath, making it "blessed" and "hallowed" (Gen 2:3). Jesus dies on the evening of the Sabbath and rests in his tomb during the Sabbath. This blessed and hallowed day marks new life emerging, for the first time at the creation of the universe, and once again as Jesus prepares for his Resurrection and the promise of Resurrection for all.



Creation marks God's first incarnation as God's love overflows into the created reality of the universe and of Earth and Earth's creations. Jesus, in the incarnation of God in human form (Phil 2:7), marks a new creation, new light, and new connections among all Earth's creatures.

Holy space – all space is holy but there are spaces which hold us in a special embrace in special moments. In this Holy Week, Jesus walks the road up to Jerusalem, stops at Bethphage and Bethany, rides on a colt on the road into Jerusalem, celebrates the Last Supper at the upper room in the house in Jerusalem, laments on the Mount of Olives, is betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, is brought to the high priest's house and is condemned in Pilate's court and then in Herod's palace, carries his cross on the road to Golgotha, and is buried in the rock-hewn tomb. Earth is present to Jesus throughout his suffering and death and will be there to welcome his Resurrection.



Let us reflect further on two of these holy spaces: the table and the road. The table has become a symbol of inclusion. It is a universal sign of the gathering of people to eat, to celebrate, to be in communion. One sign of God's saving love for the chosen people is the invitation to the banquet, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines" (Is 25:6). It can be a sign of radical inclusion if we choose to make it so. The first three signs of the following of Jesus, as named in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25, make this explicit, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt 25:35). At the table of the Last Supper, Jesus makes the same connection with the bread and wine and the washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus is known and condemned for "eating with tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 5:30).



In this Holy Week, Jesus will walk two very different roads, the road into Jerusalem where the people are praising him with waving palm branches and shouts of Hosanna, and the road to Golgotha marked by the carrying of his cross and the encounters with Simon and the daughters of Jerusalem. On the road into Jerusalem, Jesus accepts the praise of the people even though he knows that it will not last. On the road to Golgotha, Jesus shares his suffering and pain with Simon of Cyrene who is forced to carry his cross with him and the women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. His response to them is surprising, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children" (Lk 23:28).

In these days when we see the suffering experienced by so many with the loss of species every single day, the COVID pandemic, and the suffering of the people of the Ukraine, we can understand why the daughters of Jerusalem felt so helpless in the face of Jesus' suffering. It is not difficult for us to understand why Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Richard Rohr ofm gives us hope with his words, "When the weight of the suffering of the world closes around us, we can easily feel suffocated from the grief and pain. What would happen if in these moments we reached out to connect with others? In grief and

pain, together. Not alone. Together.” He follows these words with a reflective poem, [“It Can’t Be Carried Alone”](#):

How can we not feel shock or rage at what is
happening
to the people of Ukraine—
As we watch their suffering unfold in real time
from an unfair distance?
Who of us does not feel inept or powerless
before such manifest evil? In this, at least, we are
united.
Our partisan divisions now appear small and trivial.
Remember what we teach: both evil and goodness are,
first of all, social phenomena.
The Body of Christ is crucified and resurrected
at the same time. May we stand faithfully
Inside both these mysteries (contemplation).
In loving solidarity, we each bear what is ours to carry,
the unjust weight of crucifixion,
in expectant hope for God’s transformation.
May we be led to do what we can on any level (action)
to create resurrection!
The people of Ukraine have much to teach the world.



Palm Sunday
Ivan Tvorozhnikov

We conclude our reflections on this Passion Sunday with the opening words of the Liturgy of the Word from the book of Isaiah, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning God wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (Is 50:4). This verse was used to describe Catherine McAuley by the sisters who wrote in their annals after she had died. The verse holds special meaning for us as we begin this Holy Week. In these times of suffering and pain, whether globally through the pandemic or war in Ukraine or locally in our personal lives, we are invited by our God to “listen as those who are taught” and then, taught and nourished by God’s word, to sustain each other with a word.

During the first days of this Holy Week, I invite you to choose one image of time or of space associated with Jesus’ suffering and death (word, light, water, one of Earth’s living ones, the table, the road). Hold the image in your imagination and in your heart. Let God waken your ear to hear. Be surprised and delighted by new wisdom. Then you can sustain another with a word. Who is that “other” (human or other-than-human) who needs your sustaining, supportive, and mercy-filled presence? Trust the confidence that God has in you to be that compassionate presence.

Let us go now into the pain and the hope of Holy Week, encouraged by this [poem-prayer](#) of Roddy Hamilton:

may we remain here to whisper our hosannas
throughout this week in every moment
when the world goes silent on the cause of God
may we remain crying out the beat
the hosanna beat that marks the rhythm of this week

in the sound of the breaking bread
hear the broken hosanna still we believe in love's way
in the sound of coins being counted
hear the betrayed hosanna still we trust in love's choice
in the twisting of the crown of thorns
hear the tortured hosanna still we believe in love's way
in the sound of the lashes, all thirty-nine
hear the scourged hosanna still we trust in love's choice
in the sound of nails being hammered
hear the crucified hosanna still we believe in love's way
in the sound of silence
hear the empty hosanna still we trust in love's choice
may we remain here to whisper our hosannas
throughout this week in every moment
may we remain with you O Jesus
still believing, still following, still your companions
and let the stones remain silent

