

## Good? Friday

Every year, as we enter what I call "the marathon of Holy Week", I struggle with the lengthy details of Jesus' torture and death which we solemnly remember at this time. These are the longest readings in the year, and certainly not the most cheerful. Then there is the part of the readings where the congregation is supposed to say/shout the lines: "Crucify him! Crucify him!". Every part of me wants to shout "NO! I won't be a part of this" but I keep silent rather than risk getting evicted from the building. But I wonder how often, in life today, I crucify the Christ in my brothers and sisters by shouting "Crucify Him" by my attitudes and values.

The early followers of "the Way" also tried to find some meaning in the execution of their beloved Master. They were not as removed from the reality of Roman crucifixion as we are. They knew the smells, the sounds and the sights of men executed by hanging, probably naked, in a public place, exposed to ridicule and contempt in the agony of pain and death.

Christian writers used many images to try and understand this event that seemed to destroy all their dreams and expectations. As the disciples on the road to Emmaus say in Luke 24: "We had hoped ...." So they turned to what they knew of Temple sacrifices and the Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7), of laws demanding restitution when a party is injured (Romans 5:1ff), of families and inheritance (Romans 8).

Through time, we have used these images to comfort and strengthen, and have abused them as well. The Medieval doctrine of "Atonement" became a picture of a God who had to defend his honour after it was damaged by our sinfulness. So a "pure" and "holy" sacrifice was offered in the person of Jesus, God's son, who atoned for our sin. One family I know used these metaphors of love and death to urge a woman to stay with a husband who tried to kill her while she slept. In doing so she would "be like Jesus, who died for sinners". This image seems to me totally contrary to the nature of a loving Creator of life. Still, it persists in some people, creating a "victim mentality" that seems to me to contradict the Father who Jesus reveals, while it maintains systems of injustice and oppression.

I believe that we must connect Jesus death with his life and teaching and keep both in mind during the liturgical year. Proclaiming God's Kingdom of justice, non-violence and compassion in an empire of oppression, military might, and greed is a ticket to rejection and even death. Oscar Romero, Dorothy Stang, M.L.King, Maura Clark, Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, Dorothy Kazel and so many others give witness to the dangers of proclaiming the reign of God in a society ruled by systems of domination.

Jesus chose to be faithful to his mission to proclaim God's Kingdom. He remained committed to those he loved in spite of the danger. His hopes were not fulfilled and he died a "failure", the one his disciples "had hoped would be the salvation of Israel".

Our faith dares to believe that evil does not have the final word, that the God of compassion raised Jesus from death and overcomes evil in all it's forms. It tells us that the God Jesus reveals does not side with the rich and powerful, but with those who are vulnerable and oppressed. It reveals the depths of our own hearts and minds, and our faithfulness to God's kingdom.

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