

## Reflection: Holy Week

The Church raises her thanksgiving to the Father in this week of intensive recollection and celebration of the saving passion and the glorious resurrection of our Lord. Lent, as preparation for and leading into the celebration of the sacred *Paschal Triduum*, is likened to traversing through the desert of thirst, hunger and dearth in order to enter the green pastures and quiet waters gained by the Lamb that was slain and raised to life again (cf. *Revelation* 5:6-13). Just as Lent is a period of walking towards baptism for those disposed to embrace the gift of salvation, it is also a time for the baptized to deepen their incorporation into Christ.

The healing and life-nurturing water of baptism welling up from the side of Christ on the cross (cf. *John* 19:34; *Ezekiel* 47:1-12, *Revelation* 22:1-5) is the fountain for a new and grace-filled life. The banquet of the Risen Lord, which the Holy Eucharist is, enlivens the Christian with holiness and vitality. "As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us, we are made strong, and as we drink his Blood that was poured for us, we are washed clean" (from the Preface of Mass of Lord's Supper in the *Roman Missal*).

The true fruit of Passover is new life, which is Christ-like and animated by the Spirit. St. Paul understood baptism, by which a Christian partakes in this new life in Christ, as a symbiosis with Christ in His death and glory. "... *Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the death by glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*" (*Romans* 6:3-4). The idiomatic Greek expression *baptizein eis Christon*, to baptize into Christ, in these verses, signifies baptism as a dynamic and continuous journey of participating in the life of Christ and as a metamorphosis of becoming Christ. Christian growth and maturity consists of becoming "a perfect human being, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (cf. *Ephesians* 4:13).

Jesus' victory over death ushers in the birth of a new life for the world. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (*John* 3:16-17). The apostle's magnificent vision of God as the closest neighbor of humanity is explicated as victory over all wails of woes. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with human, and God will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (*Revelation* 21:3-4). Literally, the Hebrew word for tabernacle, *mishkan*, means one who dwells as a neighbor; indeed it is a spousal closeness (cf. *Revelation* 21:2) of God with human beings!

The Christian communities understood from the very beginning the novelty of Easter faith as an invitation to immersing themselves in the life of the Risen Lord through celebration of the mysteries of faith and by sharing their possessions with one another, particularly with those in need, in a bond of communion. The utopia of not having anyone under dearth among the

brethren sprang from the abundance of life in Christ, who made others rich by His life of poverty and humility (cf., *2 Corinthians* 8:9; *Philippians* 2:5-7) and a new sense of unity that they are the Body of Christ. In this they even earned the envy of their contemporaries. Tertullian (ca. 160-250), a renowned Christian writer noted: *"Each one puts in a small amount on the monthly day, or when he wishes, accordingly as he wishes and is able. No one is compelled, and it is given freely. These are, as it were, the deposits of piety. For they are not expended there from on feasts and drinking parties and in thankless houses of gluttony, but for the support and burial of the poor, for boys and girls without parents and destitute of means, for the aged quietly confined to their homes, for the shipwrecked; and if there any in the mines or in the islands or in the prisons... But it is mainly the practice of such a love which leads some to put a brand upon us. 'See' they say, 'how they love... and how ready they are to die for one another'."* (*Apologia* 39, 6-7).

The Holy Bible repeatedly teaches that the worship of God and practice of justice and charity are closely knit virtues. The destination of Exodus is twofold: liberated from the servitude of Pharaoh, Israel walks first to the Mountain of God to receive in their hearts the Torah of God in order to become the very treasure of YHWH, a chosen, holy and priestly nation (cf. *Exodus* 19:5-6). Guarded by the Law, Israel walks to possess the Land of Promise. Sinai is the destination of Exodus just as the Promised Land. Law is central to the Covenant between YHWH and the People of Israel. It constitutes their true relationship with Him and one another. *Leviticus* 19:1-20, 27 almost occurring at the centre of the Pentateuch is a clear illustration. Israel is invited to imitate what is distinctively God's, namely holiness. What is all the more interesting here is that the Torah expounds holiness as a way of life marked by concern for the poor, personal integrity and moral uprightness. The juxtaposition and interspersing of cultic and civilian laws in a single file evince the inseparability of religious life from the secular and that they are of same rank.

The perfection which Christ expects of His disciples is practice of justice with an extravagance of charity towards others (cf. *Matthew* 5:17-48; 7) and loving trust in the heavenly Father (cf. *Matthew* 6). Any form of piety without justice and charity is a lie or self indulgence (cf. *1 Corinthians* 13). Religion without genuine concern for the poor and honest commitment to building up of a sharing and caring society is idolatrous and anti-Gospel. Worship without justice is rebellion against God.

An over-consumerist culture is spewing a winter of individualism and indifferentism. Sundered from the past and the future, it is also outweighed by its fast frustrating, boring, and ultimately suicidal bents. The vanquishing of human values from institutions of learning and tending, even those belonging to Christians, plunges the society into the dark of egoism. The benign fruits and resiliency of traditional culture is being washed away by an avalanche of competitive and profit values spun in these centers. A fattened ambition for "excellence and success" today has become an easy mantra for keeping the poor at bay; and thereby these institutions themselves have degenerated into self-catering clubs.

The injustice and evil are in no way limited to the sphere of the world of humans only; their sinister effects are visible in a fast extinguishing of flora and fauna, pollution of water, land and

air and endangering of the life of the planet with poisonous emissions. The glaring truth is that it is not the poor or undeveloped nations, but the rich, the developed and greedy nations who have a major stake in ruining the ecology. It is a gospel truth that the health of a society is always in peril in the hands of the greedy.

Easter faith can serve as antidote and catalyst for a new society of communion and justice. Symbiosis with Christ inexorably leads to a witnessing to the Gospel, to its message and values. Empowered by the Spirit and illumined by the Gospel, a Christian can stand up to the villainies and vices that mar human dignity and plunge the world into a terrain of gloom and helplessness. The Gospel unleashes a power that can transform, bring about conversion of heart and fill it with a longing for the Lord, the Sun of Justice, to rise over the valley of dearth and death.

Spirit of poverty ought to be the hallmark of Christian disciples in our time. It is both a sign of their belonging to Christ and a hand tool for fighting greed which is dehumanizing and a pathogen of all social evils in any society. *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est* (where there is charity and love, God is present there). Charity is the sacrament of the presence of God.

The Ganges streams of Passover are eternally surging and, as they flow, they revitalize people and places to a civilization of life in plenty for all. The *Maranatha*, "Come Lord Jesus" (*Revelation 22:20*), is a vivid cry of the Easter faith, both as an expression of our blessed hope and sincere commitment to prepare ways for His coming in glory to judge the living and the dead.

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