



Pray for a

PASCHAL ANOINTING

Meditations for Pascha

Monthly Reflection:

April 2020

As the feast of the Pascha of our Lord draws near, Christians everywhere are preparing to observe Lent with common religious activities being either abandoned or curtailed to very small gatherings due to the COVID19 pandemic. It may be worth remembering that the Holy Scriptures tells us the story of the first Passover and the deliverance granted to Israel in the context of a series of plagues raging in Egypt. Just as the anointing with the blood of the Passover lamb saved God's people in Egypt, we ardently pray that the blood of Jesus, the Lamb without blemish may protect everyone, everywhere from the threatening virus.

The Gospels narrate the anointing story at Bethany as a prelude to the Pascha in which the Lord Jesus instituted the New Covenant in his blood. While the disciples chided the woman's anointing as extravagant, the Lord saw it as a prophetic gesture of his burial, the consummation of his self-gift to the world which he came to redeem. The Lord wants us to take care of the poor but also wants us to know that it is worth being wastrels of love.

I would like to meditate on the three focal moments of the Paschal Triduum, as a continuation and payback of the anointing at Bethany. Only this time it is Lord who opens the fountains of anointing and offers his beloved community the anointing he received from the Father.

Anointing of Service and Communion

Thursday in the Cenacle

In washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus pours out his life to cleanse them of their sins. The profound meaning of foot-washing is revealed in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. His anointing washes off the filth of egotism and superiority complexes, and clads them with the wedding garb of humility and girds them with the new commandment of Christ-like love. Thus they enter the feast of the Lamb, the Eucharist.

The Passover lamb was first to be drained of blood, which the Israelites smeared on the doorposts, and then consumed. The smearing with blood and eating of the flesh of the Lamb thus became the memorial of the Passover. Now in the new covenant under the consummate sign of bread and wine, Christ makes himself available to his beloved people as life-giving food for eternity... Called to be communicants and companions, they are anointed to become the body of Christ in the world. His new



commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you," earmarks them as the community of the Lord.

Anointing of Forgiveness and Mercy

Friday on the Cross

In the traditional Jewish liturgy of Yom Kippur, when the penitent with ransom in his hand recognizes and confesses his sin, the just Lord who is ready to save him looks for an advocate to plead on behalf of the penitent. And when God finds one, He forgives and saves the sinner. On the Cross Christ paid the ransom for all. He is the advocate for his executioners: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." The Cross, the never drying fountain of forgiveness, proclaims incessantly that Christ is never tired of loving and forgiving sinners. The unlimited forgiveness granted on the Cross, however, binds us with the obligation of forgiving others from the heart. Forgiven and reborn in Christ, we are purified to love each other as brothers and sisters.

The Cross is the symbol of mercy, which is the love that begets life. The beloved disciple saw water and blood gushing forth from the Lord when the executioner thrust the lance into his side. Spirit, water, and blood are the bridal gifts of the Lord, in which all of us are cleansed and reconciled to God. The broken flesh and blood shed on the cross turn us into the flesh and blood of the Lord.

Anointed as Missionary Disciples

Easter Sunday

Mary of Magdalene was privileged to be the first witness of the Risen Lord, who charges her with the mission of announcing to his brothers that he is ascending to "my Father and your Father, my God and your God." The good news of resurrection is that Jesus has opened the Kingdom of God for all. When the Son of God, the eternal Word became flesh, he left the lap of the Father. When he returns he does so with his companions and accomplishes the mission of welcoming humanity to come home to the Father!

Later, the same evening the Risen Lord appears to the tepid disciples inside doors, and breathes the Holy Spirit and entrusts his very mission (John 20, 20-23). "As the Father has sent me, I also send you". The supreme anointing a disciple keeps central to his calling is the voice of the Master saying, "Follow me."

At the Pascha of the Lord, we long for a touch that can profoundly transform us. Pascha unveils what lies deep and true in every human person, the thirst and need for redemption and communion. It offers the possibility of attaining the redemption we long for. The One on the Throne assures: "I will give of the fountain of water of life freely to him who thirsts...I will be his God and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21, 6-7). A meditative chant from ancient times captures the deep significance of the anointing that we long for during this Pascha - a beautiful prayer which never stales: Soul of Christ, Sanctify me...

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