

A Living Easter

Holy Week Guide

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A Living Easter

Faced with a flood of news and information, we may struggle under the weight of feelings of worry and indignation. However, along the way, there are moments that give breath to existence, guiding us toward hope. Holy Week is like that for us, a time that reorients and gives us hope for moving forward in the midst of gloom.

In the Christian tradition, Lent and Holy Week give us the occasion to remember the final days of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and meditate deeply on the Paschal Mystery: “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” However, in Guatemala and other Latin American countries, the sacredness of Holy Week is threatened by holiday and summer commerce that threatens to distract our attention.

The relevance of Holy Week is given weight by the historical events in scripture around the slavery of the people of Israel. For Israel, the Passover signified the act of liberation offered by God. The Passover memory has coursed through the veins of God’s people, finding its ultimate expression in the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This new Passover, “our Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7), reveals the mystery of life made possible by God – for ancient Israel and for us today.

Therefore, we believe that “Easter is ours to live” beyond memory, liturgy, or the forty days of Lent. Experiencing Holy Week and Easter is an act of liberation amidst the forces of death that afflict the people of God today. May we imagine an Easter that once again puts life at the center, especially the life of the migrant community, the victims of war, of systems of corruption, and of societies in constant secularization.

In this first installment of a devotional guide through Holy Week, we briefly review each day of the week in which “the hour” of the Son of Man is fulfilled (John 12:23). Each day revolves around different crucial moments that marked Jesus’ ascension to supreme glory in his resurrection. It is impossible to imagine or assume any glory without inevitably passing through the contradictions of the present century. It is a path that cannot be walked alone; in fact, it is essential to walk together as neighbors.

It is our hope and prayer that this guide will capture the attention of its readers in faith communities and churches, as well as encourage the meditation and commitment to which the Paschal Mystery calls us in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

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To use this guide

Just as the Christian tradition remembers the glorious birth of Jesus at Christmas, the days of his passion, death, and resurrection are also commemorated during Lent and Holy Week. Both events mark the incursion of God's saving action in human history. The Bible, in perspective, highlights this action amidst the many dark scenarios of the human journey.

Our current context, in Guatemala, Latin America, and beyond, continues to be a setting in which the good news of the gospel is relevant and urgent! Therefore, with this devotional guide, we seek to meditate on and "relearn" the preciousness of life, just as Jesus perceived it, to the point of fighting for it to the very end.

We encourage the creation of participatory spaces such as small groups when using this guide, with the hope that every person, regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, or social position, can be part of this experience, consistent with the inclusive practices of Jesus Christ.

We recommend:

- This Guide be used with a spirit of meditation, prayer, and fasting, and at a dedicated time, in an appropriate place, away from distractions.
- That the daily reading assigned to the corresponding day be followed, preferably in community. The Guide is divided into 8 sections, one for each day, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.
- That the various sections be used to build a collective devotional experience, combining prayer, reading, praise, and the sharing of reflections and feelings among the participants.
- That the sections "What is the biblical text saying to us?" and "How do we respond to God?" be participatory spaces that foster a progressive experience. The first invites us to savor and dive into a direct encounter with the text. The second invites us to respond and commit to the word we perceive from the first encounter and the reflection provided.
- That the time for a song (or poem) be a time actively to offer praise to God beyond simply listening. Therefore, we recommend that the corresponding lyrics be provided to the participants.
- Biblical references are from New Revised Standard Version -NRSV-

We pray that this resource may be useful to every person, family, or church, and that, by revisiting the tradition of Holy Week and sharpening our active listening to the Word of God, we may understand "the Living Easter" here and now.

I am not moved, my God...

I am not moved, my God, to love Thee
by the Heaven Thou hast promised me;
nor am I moved by fear of Hell
to cease for that reason to offend Thee.

Thou art what moves me, Lord; it moves me to see Thee
nailed to a cross and scorned;
it moves me to see Thy body so wounded;
I am moved by the insults and death that Thou undergoest.

I am moved, in sum, by love for Thee, and so greatly
that, even if there were no Heaven, I would still love Thee,
and even if there were no Hell, I would still fear Thee.

Thou dost not have to give me anything to make me love Thee,
for even if I did not hope for what I do hope for,
I would love Thee the same as I do love You.

Author unknown;
attributed to Juan de Ávila, Lope de Vega o Santa Teresa de Jesús.

No me mueve, mi Dios...

No me mueve, mi Dios, para quererte
el cielo que me tienes prometido,
ni me mueve el infierno tan temido
para dejar por eso de ofenderte.

Tú me mueves, Señor: muéveme el verte
clavado en una cruz y escarnecido;
muéveme ver tu cuerpo tan herido,
muéveme tus afrentas y tu muerte.

Muéveme, en fin, tu amor, y en tal manera
que, aunque no hubiera cielo, yo te amara,
y aunque no hubiera infierno, te temiera.

No me tienes que dar porque te quiera;
pues aunque lo que espero no esperara,
lo mismo que te quiero te quisiera.

Autor anónimo.
Podrían ser Juan de Ávila o Lope de Vega o Santa Teresa de Jesús.

Jesus enters Jerusalem

Sunday, April 13, 2025

Introduction

Holy Week begins by recalling Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, amidst the acclaim of those who have certain expectations of him. His popularity is especially troublesome to those in power, but also to the same multitudes who expect a Messiah that lives up to their own judgment and convenience. Jesus' determined presence in Jerusalem goes beyond human expectations, for his Kingdom is a realm with profound reach, where weapons and power are overcome by love and mercy. Jesus presents himself in Jerusalem like someone who knows that he will encounter there the most difficult hour of his life, yet who moves forward in love. What expectations does Jesus' presence in our place and time create for us?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important expression in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of God! We begin this Holy Week with fervor and reverence.

Response: God of our salvation, your people await you. Come to us, Jesus.

Call: We cry out today for your presence to renew this languishing creation.

Response: God of our salvation, we place our lives, our dreams, and our realities at your feet.

All: Hosanna! Amen.

Bible Reading: John 12:12-19 (Mark 11:1-11), NRSV

What is the biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Brayan Alvarado

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the end for Jesus of Nazareth. We are at the threshold of Passion Week, also known as Holy Week. And for those of us who have decided to follow Jesus, this is an ideal occasion with a threefold purpose: first, to prepare ourselves and become more aware of Jesus' life; second, to walk alongside him, delve deeper into his experience, and discover, on the way to the cross, both the love and courage of the Nazarene; and third, to clarify that in these days we do not celebrate or rejoice in Jesus' death, but rather we remember his total self-giving, his fidelity to God, and his commitment to life.

For the Jewish people in first-century Palestine, Passover was a time of celebration and joy. Jerusalem was the destination where many families made a pilgrimage to remember their history of liberation. Amidst this fervor, bustle, and preparations, Jesus joined the caravan full of conviction, took the initiative, and organized its entry into the great city.

To better understand this event, we must look at the context of that time: the powerful proclaimed themselves kings and believed they had dominion over all—even God—making spectacular entrances on beautiful, large horses, announcing their “good news,” which in reality were tidings of pain, misfortune, and suffering. Therefore, Jesus’ arrival was a profound contrast; the Galilean arrived without royal horses, without an army or weapons, without violence or intimidation. He entered announcing peace, accompanied by a borrowed donkey, palm branches, the songs of several people, and the hope of a new time (Zechariah 9:9).

This entry puzzled more than a few, because both yesterday and today, many people expected—and continue to expect—a warrior-type Messiah, marked by strength and power. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is often imagined as a triumphant and spectacular event, as a direct confrontation with the Romans to expel them from the territory and establish a theocracy. It has also been viewed as folklore, something beautiful and harmless, without any major social or political implications. The truth is that his arrival in the center of Israel meant, on the one hand, a protest against the religious authorities, who used God and religion as instruments to punish people, forgetting that God was more interested in justice and mercy than sacrifices; on the other, a denunciation of the political authorities, who decided which lives mattered and which did not; and finally, a prophetic announcement: the man who comes today reveals to us a God unarmed and stripped of all dominant power, for his Reign is the source of justice, hope, peace, and absolute well-being.

Hence, Passion Week is an opportunity to discern our perceptions of Jesus. In what ways does the Nazarene arrive today? What do we expect with his arrival: strength and power, or love and compassion? What God does Jesus’ arrival reveal to us? For from the time the Master traveled through the villages and cities announcing the Reign of God, many people wondered if he was the one coming or if they should wait for someone else. Likewise, his presence in Jerusalem generated the same concern: Is it really you, or should we continue to wait? For the Galilean does not demand an earthly throne, does not justify violence, nor does he announce times of terror. Rather, he preaches love, acts with mercy, and sympathizes with our suffering.

Therefore, to him we sing:

Hosanna, hosanna,
blessed are you who come
in the name of the Lord,
blessed are your feet, O Jesus,
herald of justice and peace!

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: “Mantos y Palmas”

<https://himnosycanciones.com/acordes/mantos-y-palmas-hosanna-al-rey/>

Prayer

On this Sunday, we begin the day with devotion, but also ready to encounter and walk with Jesus in his final hour. Grant us, Lord, the strength of your Spirit to recognize and work for the Reign of God that Jesus proclaimed, that we may be people today who bring the good news to where it is most needed in our time. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Introduction

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, what was supposed to be the center of worship for the nations was now a kind of “den of thieves.” This journey in Jesus’ life emphasized this prophetic action to denounce the perverse religiosity that fostered corruption. He needed to take “ownership of the temple” to reclaim its essence and purpose, thus unraveling the deviant motivations of a dark system. This action aims to restore the sacred place and dignity to every person, regardless of their economic status. Here is a triggering cause of the conspiracy against the Master, but more than that, a forceful intervention on behalf of the less fortunate. What does this suggest in terms of religiosity, spirituality, and repentance?

How do we enter into God’s presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: Your presence, Lord, is the sacred place where we find rest, strength, and instruction for our journey in this world.

Response: May every person find a place in your house, O God, a place where they are dignified and valued with love.

Call: May Jesus come to overturn the tables and unleash your prophetic voice so that the place of your presence may be honored.

Response: As temples of your Spirit, purify us, O God, removing all corruption and returning us to sweet divine communion. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:12-17 NRSV

What is the biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Leticia Ramírez Rodríguez

An extremely interesting and provocative story is told in Matthew 21:12-17, where we see an angry Jesus destroying everything in his path as he reclaims a territory overturned by greed, corruption, and dishonest gain: the courtyard of Herod’s temple in Jerusalem. This action is emblematic of his authority; however, there are other voices silenced by power that, in unison, offer their own testimony.

The authority of the “Son of Man” on earth is proclaimed by marginalized groups (children, infants, blind, sick, mute, lame, etc.), because these are voices in need of love and recognition. This is the reason for their strength when they are called “oaks of righteousness for God” (Isaiah 61:3 NRSV): their ability to persuade, through their



praise and recognition, those reluctant people who have turned their hearts into “a den of robbers.” However, what authority do marginalized groups recognize in Jesus?

Matthew 21:12-17 allows us to observe Jesus striving unwaveringly to imbue humanity with the values of his Kingdom: justice, joy, peace, and love – values that lead to a full life; to highlight the human need for a life connected with divinity; to raise awareness, through his miracles, that goodness and mercy among human beings is possible. Jesus authoritatively claims his territory in our hearts because therein lies every human action, repentance, and lasting peace.

The invitation to meditate is on the table: transcend media-driven religiosity for a genuine faith that proclaims the meaning of a Kingdom made possible in a world convulsed by hatred, death, and indifference. Let us work side by side as humanity to reverse the consequences that now overwhelm us.

Today, more than ever, it is time to adopt the same attitude as Jesus and listen to those silenced voices that, in these times, invite us to remember the life of a man whose primary mission was the act of love, but not in a discursive, manipulative, or selfish way.

The love of Jesus is an inexhaustible balm for suffering, discomfort, and pain, but it is not palliative; Jesus teaches us to fish, to work, and to unite to support one another as members of humanity with the firm purpose of building a reality that unites us, and brings peace and unity.

The silenced voices cried out in unison: Hosanna to the Son of David! Because it is God himself who inspires in every human heart the testimony of the authority of Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son. We are invited during Holy Week to recognize marginalized groups and to see them again through Jesus' eyes, in a gaze between equals, a gaze of love and service: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40 NRSV). This is the loving authority of the Son of Man.

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: “Las puertas de tu casa”

<https://cancionerometodista.com/canciones/las-puertas-de-tu-casa/>

Prayer

On this Monday, we pray, beloved God, that you restore our devotion to the most sublime light. May we have a faith around your house, a faith with outstretched arms, open and communicative, walking with your people, especially with those who have been mistreated.

Introduction

Holy Tuesday recalls the day Jesus cursed a fig tree and it withered, leaving a lesson behind. This reference intertwines the announcement of the abandonment and betrayal of Jesus' disciples with the event of the fig tree that did not bear the expected fruit. It seems that this critical moment points to a faith that demands offering the fruits of the kingdom while facing the worst adversity. At the same time, it is a moment that highlights true discipleship, a discipleship willing to walk with Jesus in the face of a world that does not meet people's basic needs. What are the fruits evident in Christianity today?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: God of life, on this Tuesday of Holy Week we come before you, leaving behind the hustle and bustle of daily life and breathing your air in this special moment.

Response: Yes, God, our whole being responds to your call.

Call: We heed your call; we come before you with hearts open to listen, willing to learn.

Response: Yes, God, we understand that your words are Spirit and Life for us. Amen.

Bible Reading: Mark 11:12-14; 20-25 NRSV

What is the biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Arnoldo Aguilar

Mark the evangelist, while developing the narrative of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, takes time to detail a very particular experience Jesus had with a fig plant, "a fig tree." It is said that the day after Jesus entered Jerusalem, after being in Bethany, he was heading with his disciples to the temple. On the way, Jesus was hungry, and since he had nothing to eat, he placed his hopes in a leafy fig tree he saw in the distance. Perhaps interrupting his journey, he headed toward the fig tree, hoping to find some fruit there to satisfy his need. To his surprise, after walking toward it, he found not a single piece of fruit hanging from the branches of the plant. The experience was frustrating; Jesus was unable to satisfy his hunger.

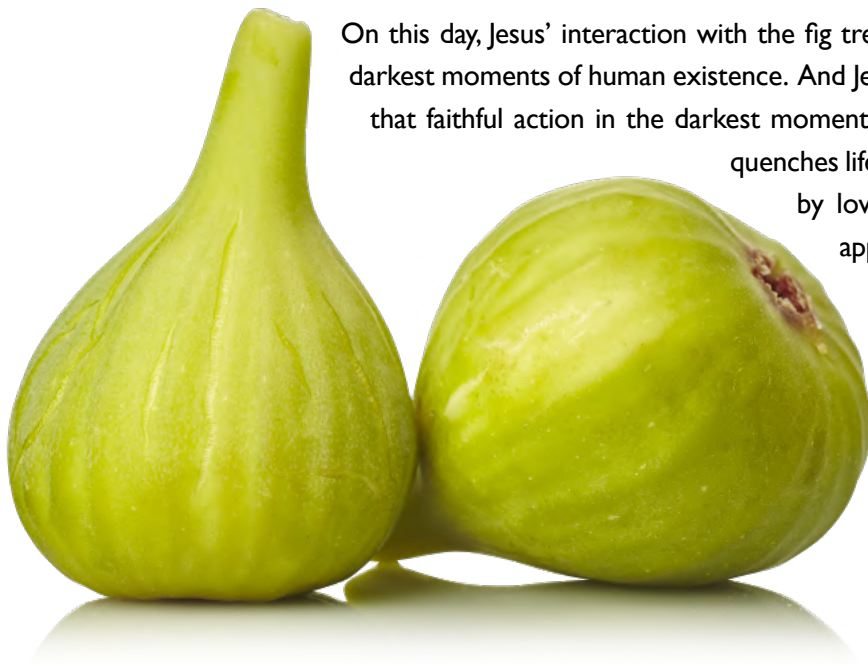
To be hungry is to live in a state of anguish, especially when there are no immediate possibilities of satiety. In extreme cases, as is often the case in many of our Latin American countries, hunger is the prelude to death. This human condition is what confronts Jesus in this scene. It characterizes and sympathizes with all the people in history and in the present who live searching for food, without opportunity to obtain it.

Jesus didn't find any fruit on the fig tree that attracted him, although it wasn't "the season for figs," and we have no doubt that Jesus knew this. Some possibility existed when he contemplated the foliage; that external manifestation was truly appealing. But nothing, no hungry person would gain anything more than a frustrating attraction. Consequently, Jesus speaks to the plant as if it were a figure, rebuking it, "Let no one ever eat your fruit again!" (Mark 11:14). The statement assumes that the tree had borne fruit at its season, but had not done so when the Son of Man demanded it, especially at that crucial moment when agony was building.

Indeed, the Gospel of Mark articulates this experience prior to Jesus' denunciation of Jewish religiosity in the temple of Jerusalem. A religiosity that had ignored the covenant with God and the life of the people in order to prioritize its petty interests. It is later verified that, the following morning, the reviled fig tree was completely dry (Mark 11:20).

In the Old Testament, the metaphor of the fig tree regularly represents the house of Israel (Hosea 9:10), but especially its barrenness in the face of justice and fidelity to the covenant with Yahweh (Jeremiah 8:13; Micah 7:1). Israel, as a people, was commissioned to be a fruitful plant for all nations, but in the end, it chose to be a showy shrub, adorned by its religiosity, but barren in terms of satisfying the hunger and thirst for justice. Therefore, it is no coincidence that this happened in Jesus' time in Jerusalem, since the fate of the fig tree was equivalent to that of Israel. Both had history, potential, and grace, but they did not know how to be and do what they were planted in the earth for.

This story challenges us to consider the fruits that the reign of God demands. At all times, there is a hunger for these fruits; life cannot be sustained solely by the abundance of religious activities, the most pious disciplines, or the highest forms of worship. In Guatemala, in 2024, 83 minors died of malnutrition. They came into the world and suffered hunger without finding the bare minimum to satisfy their needs. In the same way, they suffered frustration; this social and "Christian" fig tree denied them the fruit to live with dignity. To this, we say, No! It is unacceptable to speak of faith without fruits to satisfy the hunger and thirst for justice of one's neighbor.



On this day, Jesus' interaction with the fig tree speaks of the faithfulness required in the darkest moments of human existence. And Jesus, faced with Israel's barrenness, embodies that faithful action in the darkest moments. He becomes bread, wine, and water that quenches life. He is the prototype of a faithfulness moved by love for humanity. As before, dark hours are approaching, which offer another opportunity to cultivate a Christian discipleship that responds to the hunger of this world. Therefore, now more than ever it is important to cultivate a coherent, dynamic, living, and responsible faith, always available to satisfy humanity's needs.

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: “Que esta iglesia sea un árbol”

<https://cancionerometodista.com/canciones/que-esta-iglesia-sea-un-arbol/>

Prayer

On this Tuesday, we want to walk with you, Jesus, uniting our lives with those who suffer from hunger, but assuming our responsibility to meet that need. May God make us fruitful trees, always willing to freely give what we have freely received. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Between faithfulness and betrayal

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Introduction

This Wednesday calls to mind the betrayal plotted against Jesus and his movement. The fact that one of his disciples was part of this plan invites us to consider the choice of fidelity or betrayal, both possibilities that challenge discipleship today. In terms of the Kingdom of God, fidelity and betrayal may be lived out not only in relation to Jesus, but also in relation to every person who pursues justice. As Christians, how do we define our discipleship in the face of these two options?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: Our God, this Wednesday of Holy Week we come before you challenged to be faithful disciples, understanding that our strength often wanes in the attempt.

Response: Faithful God, give us the clarity and firmness to remain faithful to your Kingdom.

Call: We pray in the midst of a Christian society that proclaims its victories while forgetting pain and injustice.

Response: Faithful God, teach us to be faithful to you, faithful to justice, faithful to life. Amen.

Bible Reading: Luke 22:1-6; 47-54 NRSV

What is the biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Arnoldo Aguilar

The time of bitter judgment is drawing ever closer for Jesus, a time marked by human betrayal. There was always persecution against Jesus, because many people hated him and wanted to kill him for proclaiming the newness of the gospel. But they were unsuccessful, as the evangelist John expresses when he says: "They sought to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come" (John 7:30).

Although Jesus' enemies burned with rage, they could not harm him prematurely, because God had arranged a mission for the Savior to carry out as far as necessary. This created an atmosphere in which hatred against him was refined and evil plans were perfected. The kingdom of darkness was desperately confronted by the truth of the gospel, which it could no longer tolerate. The betrayal was consummated during the days of Passover, paradoxically, during the most significant feast of the liberation of the Jewish people.

What was happening in this conspiracy was a terrible injustice, made all the more bitter by the revelation that it was perpetrated by one of the Master's friends. Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, plotted with the evil religious

leaders to conspire against Jesus. Luke 22:3-6 speaks of Judas going to the priests to negotiate and hand Jesus over in exchange for money. In response to these objectives, Jesus said: "While I was with you daily in the temple courts, you did not lay your hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

That was "the hour of betrayal and the power of darkness." Now, the enemies would see their evil plan advance. They fail to understand that Jesus is innocent of all guilt; they are blinded by their own religious concepts and principles. They have such hatred toward those who think differently that they cannot even consider dialogue or the benefit of the doubt. Their hearts understand that if someone does not agree with their views or interests, they must be removed from their path.

The hour of betrayal accelerated Jesus' suffering. The opposing powers attacked the Son of Man, but also his plan of salvation. But in this story, it was not only Judas and those like him who opposed Jesus. Opposition to Jesus and his teachings continues to exist, just as there are people who sell their fellow human beings for a few pieces of silver. Even those who deny the value of life and exterminate it become enemies of Jesus and the gospel.

How much intolerance does humanity experience today? How much incarnate hatred toward those who hold a different point of view? Has this story not been enough for us? Every time our lives and our interests claim superiority over others, aren't we betraying those we should love and respect as fellow human beings? When our actions denigrate the humanity of others, discriminating, trampling on rights, and inflicting violence, we betray the principle of life for which Jesus fought, and, at the same time, we betray ourselves, denigrating life's value.

In our time, as in that time, the betrayal of life does not thwart God's redemptive plan, but it does spoil the opportunity to converge with the Spirit of life. After the betrayal, the Son of God received all divine support, proving that He was just in an unjust world; that He was good in an evil world; that He was right and the whole world wrong. Betrayal can never nullify God's impulse, which is why fidelity, loyalty, and solidarity with the plan of life are so important to us. May our journey, our resources, and our gifts contribute to the joy, peace, and dignity of our sisters and brothers.

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Poem

Only before you, the One who knows the human heart,
before you, are we sinners.
Afraid to suffer, poor in deeds,
we have betrayed you before the people.
We have seen how lies raised their heads
and we did not honor the truth.

We have seen brothers in supreme affliction
and we have feared only death itself.
We confess ourselves before you as human beings,
confessing our sin.
Lord—after the turmoil of these times—
grant us times of affirmation!
Let us, after so much wandering, see the dawn!

Brother, sister, until at the end of the long night
our day dawns, let us resist!

- O -

Sólo ante ti, sondeador de todo ser, ante ti somos pecadores.
Temerosos de sufrir, pobres en hechos,
te hemos traicionado ante la gente.
Vimos como la mentira alzó su rostro
y no rendimos honores a la verdad.

Hemos visto hermanos en aflicción suprema
y solo hemos temido la propia muerte.
Nos confesamos ante ti como seres humanos,
confesando nuestro pecado.
Señor —luego de la agitación de estos tiempos—,
¡concédenos tiempos de afirmación!
¡Deja que después de tanto errar, veamos la alborada!

Hermano, hermana, hasta que al final de la larga noche
amanezca nuestro día, ¡resistamos!

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, fragmentos de un poema antes de su ejecución por el nazismo,
en Yo he amado a este pueblo, La Aurora, Buenos Aires, 1969)

Prayer

On this Wednesday, faced with the possibilities of corruption, infidelity, and betrayal, let us examine whether our hearts harbor conscious or unconscious opposition to the Reign of God and God's justice. We pray, Holy Spirit, that you guide our steps toward contrition, repentance, and conversion. Make us disciples who are faithful to life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

The Passover celebrated in Jesus' time recalled liberation and the Exodus within the framework of the first covenant. Jesus participates in that Passover, but he gives it dimension through a new covenant in which he himself would be the sign of liberation and life through bread and wine. Jesus' good news (although misunderstood by many) brought the life of the Lamb of God to its climax. Around the table, all people receive God's love, which is broken and shared; no one is left out. No force in the world could stop the power of that love, which is replicated in the lives of the representatives of the Kingdom of God. How do we perceive ourselves in this story?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: Thank you, Jesus, for inviting us to your table, a table open to every person who hungers and thirsts for justice.

Response: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, your dedication and love challenge us to live faithfully to your mission.

Call: Move us, God, to extend the table today, to share the bread and wine, even when it means giving of ourselves for the good of others.

Response: Lamb of God, inspire us to build loving and responsible communities of faith. Amen.

Bible Reading: Luke 22:7-23 NRSV

What is the biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Brayan Alvarado

On the path to the cross and resurrection, the days have passed, and the atmosphere has become increasingly tense, charged with a heavy uncertainty. Rumors claim that the end is near, but at the same time, the conflict between Jesus and those in power has reached a point of no return. The religious authorities, who proclaim themselves to be representatives of God, consider Jesus' presence an obstacle, so a reaction is imminent.

Meanwhile, the aroma of freshly baked bread indicates that it is time for Passover, a joyful community celebration. People of all ages gather around the table, remember their past, and affirm their longing to live in freedom.

When Jesus gathered with his friends to share Passover, those who had chosen to be with him during his ministry, they were surely talking amid laughter and concern: "It's been said that this time we went too far. Did you see

the reactions of the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin? That was close, don't you think? And Jesus, what's the plan for tomorrow?" So, there, in that festive and intimate atmosphere, how does Jesus interpret the celebration? What will his teaching be? What does he want to share with his friends?

Thus, as he took the bread, blessed it, and shared it, Jesus said, "This is my body, given for you," which can be interpreted as an offering, a sign of friendship, mutual care, and commitment to the Reign of God. In other words, Jesus may be saying to them, "Whatever happens, remember what we have done, why you killed me, and why I died; let us remain united and never forget."

Then, as he took the chalice, he gave thanks and shared it, saying, "This is the new covenant, confirmed by my blood, which is to be poured out for you," which can be interpreted as the seal of a new bond. In other words, Jesus seeks to make them see, "If anything happens to me, repeat the gesture, and every time you meet, keep this memory, preserve it as a legacy."

Thus, at the Last Supper, Jesus reflects that God is infinite goodness. And as a result, the table is extended, welcoming all people, without exception. The scene is an everlasting reminder that the essence of the gesture is love and service, compassion and mercy.



However, despite its profound significance, the Last Supper has been subject to interpretations that distort its meaning. In various ecclesial contexts, it has been considered a reward that authorizes separating the saints from the sinners, the good from the evil. This misinterpretation has been an instrument to restrict access to the table.

The Last Supper reveals a love for life so profound that the need for blood or human suffering becomes completely unnecessary. Therefore, Passover manifests a free love that accepts the consequences of its commitment. Jesus is not a victim of God or of some human traitor; but, when faced with injustice and the abuse of power, he confronts it, does not back down, and thus desires to be remembered.

Ultimately, in a world where division, exclusion, sin that condemns, and murderous power are common, how do we commemorate Jesus' life today? What does his life remind us of? In what ways can we participate in Holy Communion as a sign of friendship and mercy in such a fragmented world?

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: "La mesa de la paz"

<https://redcreate.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/La-mesa-de-la-Paz-I.pdf>

Prayer

On this Thursday, the day of communion, help us, O God, to identify and break down all the barriers that separate and weaken us. Today more than ever, we need and long to be moved by the power of your Spirit, the same Spirit that sustains each of us to this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Holy Friday highlights the cruelty and irrationality of power in the hands of men and women, but also exposes the dehumanization that politics and religion can promote in the name of a god who only looks after the interests of a few. This path of pain prefigures the path for those who choose love and justice, for those who fight for human dignity, as Jesus did. However, in the shadows, fidelity and forgiveness shine; life in its weakness triumphs over the powerful force of death. What crucifixions continue to be conceived today? On which side of the cross are we?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: God of life, on this Friday of Holy Week we come before you, deeply moved by the cruelty of violence so prevalent in our contexts.

Response: God of life, we join our hearts with all those who today suffer violence, pain, and injustice.

Call: We come to you, O God, asking for your protection and mercy in every situation.

Response: God of refuge and strength, we pray that your peace may prevail over violence. Amen.

Bible Reading: Matthew 27:27-38 NRSV

What is the Biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Arnoldo Aguilar

Jesus' dedication to announcing the reign of God was one of the triggers for his enemies to accuse him of being a false king who wanted to promote a political and religious kingdom different from the established one. Therefore, Jesus faced opposition from the Jewish authorities, who decided to unjustly condemn and kill him. It was a corrupt agreement between the religious authorities and the military power of Rome, through Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea. Before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council), Jesus was accused of blasphemy (Mark 14:64). He was then taken to the Roman tribunal, where he was accused of being a rebel and insurgent (Luke 23:2).

Everything that was happening was a struggle between two kingdoms: that of God and that of darkness. When Jesus was questioned by Governor Pilate, he asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (John 18:33). The concern for power was evident. Jesus' response referred to the testimony of his actions on behalf of marginalized people, characteristic of a different Kingdom, where God's justice would confront the structures of human power.

Crucifixion was a Roman system of execution for slaves, rebels, and criminals. Jesus would suffer his “final hour” in cruel crucifixion, surrounded by the dishonor of that lethal instrument. There he was exposed and embedded as a banner of Roman arrogance, a warning sign for those, like him, who would seek to suggest a way of life other than that established by the powers that be.

Jesus walked “alone” in the face of the cruelty of his enemies, and even of those who had once benefited from his ministry. The experience was like a bitter cup, as he was accused, stripped naked, ridiculed, spat upon, beaten, humiliated, and crucified. Here was the righteous man, suffering the power of injustice, as if anticipating the path so many people in history have crossed when they suffer the abuse of the most powerful in this world.

Thus, Jesus would be led, amid violence and pain, toward Golgotha (the Place of the Skull), carrying his own cross. Like a lamb rendered silent, yet upholding with incomparable courage the mission the Father had entrusted to him. What was that mission? The evangelist John expresses it this way: “...Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end” (John 13:1). Jesus’ strength, in this cruel hour, came only from love, the disconcerting love that is the driving force of the kingdom of God, which proclaims, denounces, struggles, contradicts, and endures to the ultimate consequences. The grain of wheat fell to the ground, yes, but soon it would bear much fruit, fruit of salvation for generations (John 12:24).

The path of violence, pain, and injustice remains to this day the only one for millions of people who are displaced toward their “Golgotha.” Repeatedly, but in different ways, life is sacrificed under cruel social, economic, political, and religious crosses. It is the story of so many people systematically condemned to death, whose only aspiration has been to love life and cling to it, even though they have neither the resources nor the guarantees to do so.

Matthew 27:45-50 recounts that final hour of Jesus amidst impressive phenomena: the darkness, the earthquake, the open tombs, the torn veil; and in the midst of it all, two cries that Jesus uttered from the cross. The first expresses the cruel abandonment of his people, his friends, and, apparently, the Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus’ second cry manifests the end of his incarnation, a cry of pain and victory, an “it is finished,” and then he gives up his spirit. In the eyes of many, that was the moment of his defeat, but on the contrary, there on the cross, while a man was dying at the hands of an entire system, Jesus showed that injustice, corruption, violence, sin, and death will not prevail forever.

It is difficult to understand that the most horrendous moment of injustice can give way to a moment of liberation. Thus, the experience of Jesus’ sacrifice speaks of his solidarity with every person who endures the weight of injustice; but it also speaks of the legitimacy of the Reign of God, the possibility of life that undermines the kingdoms of this world. But it also speaks of the inescapable determination and hope of those who today, in the name of Jesus, resist the many forces of death. Therefore, in a new experience of discipleship, Jesus encourages us to take up our own cross and walk with him, to endure and not give up! To fight with the power of love and confront the cruel forces of this world! Without fear, bear the cross as we go through life!

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: “Peregrinos de un tiempo de paz”

<https://redcrearte.org.ar/peregrinos-de-un-tiempo-de-paz/>

Prayer

On this Friday, let us observe a moment of silence to remember the time of Jesus’ final hour. [silence]

We are amazed, O God, by the sacrifice of love that Jesus made for humanity, and we give thanks for it; help us to live in such a way that we also understand that seeking the good of humanity is worth the effort required. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Introduction

This day calls for recollection, silence, and meditation that leaves in its wake what we think should not happen. Jesus died; that is the reality. His humanity, like that of every mortal, was vulnerable. We experience the tangible effects of death and separation, of pain and helplessness; but we live in the hope that life will prevail, even though we understand that the threat of death is part of the journey of the cross. Is that how we have faith in Jesus? Is our journey one in which carrying a cross confronts us with the power of death?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: On this Saturday of Holy Week, we pray amidst the uncertainties that confront us as we see the world slowly crumbling.

Response: God of creation, from whence will our help come if not from you?

Call: We pray, O God, that you open our eyes to see that nothing and no one can hinder the river of your love and your transforming power in the present time.

Response: Creator God, renew our hope and joy, so that we know that you are working to build your Reign in spite of the kingdom of this world. Amen.

Bible Reading: Luke 23:48-56

What is the Biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Arnoldo Aguilar

When Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross of Golgotha, all the sacrifices established in the Old Testament ended. The true Lamb of God was presented as the good thanksgiving offering before God. Afterward, we encounter a period of time that demands great sensitivity, expectation, and hope. It is the time marked by Jesus' death and the apparent end of his movement.

After the hubbub surrounding the crucifixion, with the death-seeking intentions and actions of Jesus' enemies exhausted, doubts and uncertainty surface, perhaps stirring the conscience of more than a few who beat their chests in open contrition. Many crucifixions had occurred in Israel, but this one, the crucifixion of Jesus, was very different because he was a righteous man.

In the midst of that dreary scene, with Jesus dead on the cross, comes the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea, an important person, a member of the Supreme Council of the Jews, but also a righteous man and a follower of Jesus. He interceded with Pilate to have Jesus taken down from the cross and buried. With that authorization, Joseph and his companions took Jesus' body down from the cross, wrapped it in a cloth, and placed it in a tomb. A large stone was then placed to block the entrance. The stone seemed to mark the conclusion, the end of the story.

Graciously, Joseph of Arimathea and the disciples who accompanied Jesus from Galilee refused to abandon Jesus' body; they honored it by placing their resources at its service. How we would love to know what that experience of dealing with the Savior's body was like, now not in the weakness of a manger, but in the weakness of a tomb.

There was Jesus' body, sacrificed, no longer moving, no longer speaking, no longer embracing anyone. Those feet that had visited so many villages, those hands stretched out to restore life to so many people, were now there, motionless, cold, and inert. Everything happened just as he had insistently announced: "...For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

That silent moment, in which Jesus' body lay buried, was just another critical moment in his vocation, one distinguished not by his actions or his words, but by his stillness. Even Jesus' stillness, even his deprivation, communicates his impact on human history. Thus, it is good to remember that the transforming impact of the Reign of God does not always happen in public or strident spheres; often that impact is generated from that which is invisible, perhaps drip by drip, in the small actions that add up to change.

When human vision can only see the tomb where Jesus' body lay, his spirit continues his liberating message, now from the mysterious depths where the throne of evil was conceived, as 1 Peter 3:18-19 points out: "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison."

The ancient traditions of early Christians understood that Jesus' silent incursion meant the plundering of the domains of the Evil One, of Satan, of the spiritual forces of evil. They also understood that even in those depths, the redemption of those under the power of the Evil One was taking place. Hidden from the visible surface, the seed that fell to the ground was beginning to germinate. Its presence proclaims its victory, from the deepest depths to the most sublime realms that could exist. Saint Paul will say that "He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10).

The irresistible force of life was soon to emerge, and death itself would be perplexed by its ascension. With it, hope shines for those who have been confined to the shadow of death, for whom life has been only a cold grave. Now, in Jesus, the empire of death is brought to judgment. Glory to God! The righteous one has triumphed; justice goes before him, as if opening a path for our faith.

The resurrection of Jesus is his triumph over the oppressors who raged against him, subjecting him to torture and death on the cross. Today we must preach it with the same confidence of victory in God's power over the forces in this world that seem to hold the reins of power. In heaven, at the heart of God's creation, Jesus and his followers sit on the throne of God. From there are determined the destinies of this world that God created (Jorge Pixley).

(Jorge Pixley, La resurrección de Jesús el Cristo, 1997, p.76, CIEETS, CEDEPCA, CCM)

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: “Es tiempo de esperar”

<https://redcreate.org.ar/es-tiempo-de-esperanza/>

Prayer

We pray to you on this Saturday, embracing hope, even though our eyes cannot see what is happening in the depths. Give us the strength, Lord, not to give up, but to hope that in the midst of peace, the seeds of all those who, like Jesus, have died hoping for a different world, may take root and grow. Amen.



Hallelujah! Jesus is risen!

Sunday, April 20, 2025

Introduction

The joy of Palm Sunday is perfected in the joy of the resurrection, precisely because Jesus is risen! Just as he had announced before, his redemptive message could not be held back, not even by death itself. Now Jesus returns to his people, seeking out his community, as he gives them life so that they may share in an abundant life that can never be extinguished. From this point on, speaking of Jesus will mean speaking of good news, of recovering life, even in the face of the dehumanizing horror of death. How can we live this new life with Jesus?

How do we enter into God's presence today?

Coming into the presence of God is an important act in itself. It is good to come with all that we are today, with our conscious and unconscious desires and concerns. May we be aware of our inner and outer selves in gratitude, in repentance, or in expectation of discovering something new about God.

Prayer

Call: We come to the last day of Holy Week with profound joy in our hearts, thanking you, God, for the wonderful reality of the resurrection.

Response: Hallelujah! He is risen! Death could not stop the God of life.

Call: The tomb is empty; Jesus rose to live among his people, just as he promised.

Response: Hallelujah! He is risen! And because he lives, we also live.

Bible Reading: Matthew 28:1-20 NRSV

What is the biblical text saying to us?

Let us listen for how Scripture speaks into our daily lives.

Biblical Reflection

Betsey Moe

On Easter Sunday, Christians around the world celebrate the most defining moment in history: the moment when Jesus rose from the grave, defeated the power of death, and invited the whole human family and all of creation into resurrected life. It is a day when we look backward and remember the first, astounding Easter, and look ahead to the end of all things, when God will complete God's work of making all things new.

Matthew's account of the resurrection begins at the empty tomb. The dawn of a new day, a dramatic earthquake, and the descent of an angel who rolls away the stone signals to the women who came to honor Jesus that he is not dead, but risen. There is movement in the scene – not only the movement of the earth, but of people, as the women run to tell the other disciples what they have seen.

The movement in an outward direction continues at the end of the chapter, when Jesus tells the disciples who have gathered on a mountain because of the women's testimony to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing



and teaching, carrying on the ministry of Jesus to the ends of the earth to the end of the age. Resurrected life is propelled outward -- from the empty tomb, to the mountain in Galilee, to all the nations of the world.

However, between the scene at the empty tomb and the scene on the mountain, there is attempted interference in the propulsion of the good news: while the women were running to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen, the Roman guards who witnessed the resurrection miracle went to the chief priests to tell them the same news. The chief priests then met with the elders and decided to bribe the soldiers with hush money to conceal the truth. The soldiers were paid to say that the disciples stole Jesus' body – to spread “fake news” that, according to the text, circulated for many years.

Immediately following the miraculous, earth-quaking, world-changing event of the resurrection, there was corruption, collusion, and an attempt to hold back and conceal the work of God.

Some people might say that this scene interrupts an otherwise beautiful story, that perhaps Matthew should not have included it in his account of the resurrection because it detracts from the message of the joyful, forward movement of God into the world. Some may say that this detail gives the impression that the power of the resurrection was not as potent or transformative as God's people would have hoped.

But I am grateful that Matthew did include this story of interference; in fact, it feels important and necessary – reminding us that between the empty tomb and the return of Christ to renew all things, there will inevitably be corrupt people who act in fear and self-preservation. There will be those who seek to thwart the good news of abundant life, justice, and peace for all people.

Yet, the truth and power of the resurrection will not be concealed. By commissioning his disciples and promising to be with them, Jesus ensured that the outward movement of the gospel would continue to the end of the age – in the midst of a corrupt world.

Thanks be to God for the risen Christ who goes with us in the struggle. On Easter Sunday, let us join with the Apostle Paul in proclaiming, “In all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

How do we respond to God?

Let us express to God how this reflection on Scripture inspires us.

Song: “Resucitó”

https://acordes.lacuerda.net/kent_leroy/resucito

Prayer

We conclude this Holy Week with profound joy, celebrating Jesus’ victory over the deepest darkness. Thank you, God, for the hope that confronts us, especially as we face a challenging outlook in our Latin American reality. God of resurrection, may the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead raise us up today to fight for a dignified life in which all creation regains harmony. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV



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