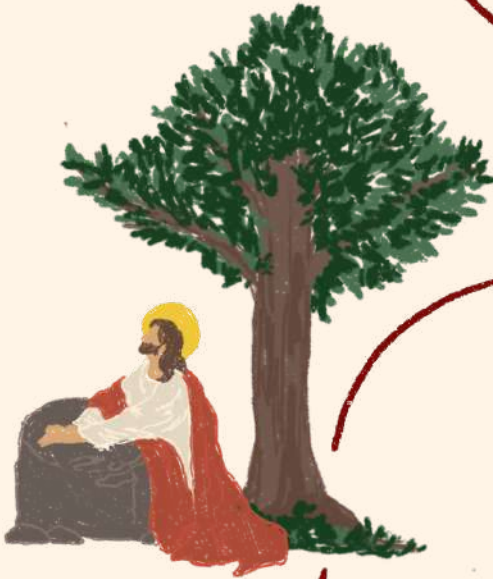


Holy Week 2024

The



Road



To



Calvary

introduction.

“Every year this liturgy leaves us amazed: we pass from the joy of welcoming Jesus as he enters Jerusalem to the sorrow of watching him condemned to death and then crucified. That sense of interior amazement will remain with us throughout Holy Week.” (Pope Francis, in his homily for Palm Sunday on 28 March 2021).

It is interesting that Pope Francis uses the word ‘amazement’ to describe the Passion narrative. Doesn’t it feel slightly strange, even, to associate the sorrow of the cross with a sense of wonder? The Pope continues in his homily, *“Amazement is not the same as admiration. To admire Jesus is not enough. **We have to follow in his footsteps, to let ourselves be challenged by him; to pass from admiration to amazement.**”*

As we commemorate the events of Holy Week, are we content with admiring what Jesus does for us from a distance, or are we prepared to bring ourselves close to Him – close enough to stay right by His side as He takes

each painful step towards the cross; close enough to feel the amazement and wonder at how deeply, and how personally He loves each of us?

In this booklet, you will find a reflection for each day of Holy Week (beginning from Palm Sunday and ending on Easter Sunday), with reflection questions which we invite you to ponder on in the course of each day. Our hope is that these reflections could help you to enter more deeply into prayer this week, by contemplating on the Gospel of each day not merely as a historical event to be recounted, but as an ongoing and active movement in your life of a love that saves.

We would love for you to join us in this journey of accompanying Jesus as He makes His way towards Calvary – come as you are! Jesus always meets us where we are; may you allow yourself to simply be drawn close to Him in these days. Let us be open to the newness which He desires to pour forth into our lives this Easter.

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Palm

SUNDAY

Gospel Reading

Mark 11:1-10

When they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, and said to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. If any one says to you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately."'

And they went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. And those who stood there said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?'

And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go.

And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields.

And those who went before and those who followed cried out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!'



reflection.

“Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem! See now, your king comes to you; he is victorious, he is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9)

How do you picture the triumphant entry of a king? It probably doesn't look anything like a man showing up unannounced, riding on the back of a lowly animal, making his way through without any fanfare or glamour. Yet this is the way that Jesus chose to make His victorious entry into Jerusalem. He who is worthy of all praise, honour and glory, today humbles Himself to make such a meek and simple entrance.

Is it surprising for us whenever we realise the extent of how much God humbles Himself for our sake? For the Jews of Jesus' time, this was surely not the image of the Messiah that they were expecting. They had hoped that Jesus would be the one to set Israel free from the Roman empire, and they were counting on the Messiah to be an all-powerful warrior.

But Jesus shows us today that His power is of a different kind: *“He will banish chariots from Ephraim and horses from Jerusalem; the bow of war will be banished.*

He will proclaim peace to the nations.” (Zechariah 9:10). Pope Benedict XVI writes, “by the time of Jesus, it was the horse that had come to signify the might of the mighty, while the donkey had become the animal of the poor, and so it served to express an entirely different image of kingship. ... He is a king who destroys the weapons of war, a king of peace and a king of simplicity, a king of the poor.” Jesus does not enter bearing instruments of violence or a message of war; rather, He comes proclaiming a blessing of peace as He proceeds into Jerusalem, walking towards the hour of His passion in order to win our salvation on the cross.

This is how God enters into our lives – humbly, tenderly, triumphantly; and this is the triumph which we celebrate today: That once God enters, nothing is ever the same again. Once Jesus enters into our lives, every joy and every sorrow has new meaning breathed into it. And once He lays His hands on our tender and broken hearts, all of our pain will be transformed, for His touch alone brings healing and restoration. In the depths of our sinfulness, Jesus does not look upon our human condition with contempt. Rather, He chooses to enter into our frailty, into the very places we are most ashamed and afraid of, so that it can be touched by His love. Where we carry the wounds of violence and abandonment in

our hearts, He calms our fears by drawing close with gentleness, bringing with Him a promise of peace and healing.

What is our response to this? Here is the response of the crowds as Jesus was entering: *“And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields”*. As our Saviour asks to enter into your heart today, what are the ‘garments’ that you need to lay down to make way for Him?

We cloak our lives in many things – for some of us, maybe our lives are cloaked with the fears and anxieties of the day, or the various distractions we often find ourselves turning to. Or perhaps we are cloaked with shame, regret, indifference, self-righteousness, or unforgiveness. Whatever it may be that is creating distance between us and the Lord, let us lay these down at His feet, and open the doors of our hearts so that He may enter once again. He desires to be close to us; let us pray for the grace today to respond with openness and love.

reflection questions:

- What am I called to lay down, to be more open and present to Jesus in the days of this Holy Week?
- We invite you to have a listen to the song, ‘Come As You Are’ (David Crowder) some time today – may you allow the words of the song to bring consolation to you:

Lay down your burdens, lay down your shame.

All who are broken, lift up your face.

Oh wanderer come home, you’re not too far.

So lay down your hurt, lay down your heart, come as you are.

Monday OF HOLY WEEK

Gospel Reading

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot – one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him – said, ‘Why wasn’t this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief;

he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions. So Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.’

Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.



reflection.

“Why wasn’t this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?” Saint John tells us immediately that the asker, Judas Iscariot, does not ask out of genuine concern for the poor. What he sees is not an opportunity for charity; he is instead resentful that oil so costly, so precious, has been ‘wasted’ on account of Jesus. And yet, one can imagine that Mary of Bethany may have possibly lamented that the jar of precious oil was still too small, too humble a gift compared to what she desired to present to Jesus. What Judas perceives as an extravagant waste, Mary offers as a humble sacrifice.

The Gospels give us glimpses of the other encounters which Mary has had with Jesus. When Jesus visited Martha and Mary’s house, Mary sat at His feet and listened to His teaching (Luke 10:39). When her brother Lazarus had died and lay in the tomb for four days, she witnessed firsthand how Jesus raised him to life once more (John 11:28-44). Mary has seen and knows Jesus to be a teacher, and a miracle-worker who can even raise the dead to life – but Judas has accompanied Jesus in his ministry and witnessed these for himself as well.

What is it that Mary sees in Jesus that Judas doesn’t? In order to understand

the ‘extravagance’ of Mary’s offering, let us contemplate on who Jesus is to Mary.

Apart from the accounts of the anointing of Jesus in the Gospels, the only other occasion that nard is mentioned in the Bible is in the Song of Songs (Song 1:12; 4:12-16), which tells a poetic tale of two lovers. The language in the Song and in John’s Gospel today are strikingly similar: “For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant...” (Song 1:3); “While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance,” (Song 1:12); “Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment.” (John 12:3). We see an image of the Bridegroom and the Bride from the Song of Songs in this moment shared between Jesus and Mary of Bethany. Of a recognition of the other as their beloved; and flowing from that, a mutual and free outpouring of love.

Beyond the externals of what Jesus has done, Mary understands the simple truth of who Jesus is: God who loves us. To see Jesus as someone worthy of such extravagance is to appreciate the unconditional and saving love which He gives to us in every moment. Love which pursues us, holds us tenderly, and rescues us again and again –

a merciful love which, as the psalmist proclaims, is better than life (Psalm 63:3).

In the presence of the One who loves her, Mary is completely free to respond with love. She is free to pour out all that she has fully, free from the anxiety of not having enough for herself, and free from the fear of what others may think or say about her.

She does not withhold her sincerity and affection even when she is surrounded by other disciples who may misinterpret her intentions, and she does not distance

herself from her Beloved even when tensions are rising in Jerusalem and orders have been issued for Jesus to be reported and arrested (John 11:57).

Mary's love costs her a great deal, not merely in its material worth but also in the danger of being accused, and in the humility it took to bend low at the feet of another. But she does not cling on to any of this and neither does she weigh the cost of her sacrifice; her simple desire is to draw close to Jesus, to stay by His side, and to accompany Him to His day of burial. Today, let us seek to learn from Mary, in loving Jesus as she does.

reflection questions:

- What has the cost of following and loving Jesus looked like in your life? In your heart, how does this compare to the love you have for Him?
 - Place yourself in the shoes of Mary of Bethany in today's Gospel as you ponder on these reflection questions. What do you desire to offer to Jesus in this Holy Week?
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Tuesday OF HOLY WEEK

Gospel Reading

John 13:21-33, 36-38

While at supper with his disciples, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, 'I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, wondering which he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, 'Ask who it is he means', so leaning back on Jesus' breast he said, 'Who is it, Lord?' 'It is the one' replied Jesus 'to whom I give the piece of bread that I shall dip in the dish.' He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus then said, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.' None of the others at table understood the reason he said this.

Since Judas had charge of the common fund, some of them thought Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival', or telling him to give something to the poor.

As soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. Night had fallen.

When he had gone Jesus said:
'Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. You will look for me, And, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come.'

Simon Peter said, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now; you will follow me later.' Peter said to him, 'Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'



reflection.

“Lay down your life for me?” answered Jesus. ‘I tell you most solemnly, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.’

Why does Jesus reveal Peter’s impending denial? We know from the Gospels that Peter is not without his shortcomings, but he has on multiple occasions shown his faith in and loyalty towards Jesus. Yet on this night of the Last Supper, Peter’s declaration of loyalty is met with a stern response from Jesus, and a foretelling of an act that Peter has not even committed.

Without understanding Jesus’ intentions, we may misinterpret His words as an accusation or condemnation of Peter. But the heart of God is not one of condemnation – God is love, and all which Jesus says and does are from love and for love. Today, let us contemplate on what Jesus does here in the light of Love.

While we have read John’s Gospel today, Mark’s Gospel provides a more detailed account of this conversation between Jesus and Peter:

“Peter said, ‘Even if all lose faith, I will not’. And Jesus said to him, ‘I tell you solemnly, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times’. But he repeated still more earnestly, ‘If I have to die with you, I will never disown you’. (Mark 14:29-31)

As it is recorded, Peter seems to have the last word on this matter. He is resolute that even if all disciples lose their faith, even if he is to be put to death, he will be the one to never disown Jesus. However, we know how this eventually plays out after Jesus is arrested:

“At that instant, while he was still speaking, the cock crew, **and the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter**, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will have disowned me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:60-62)

Are we surprised at ourselves when we fall into sin? For Peter, his confidence in himself has been torn down in an instant – he learnt on this night that he is not spared from his weaknesses and shortcomings. While he may have preferred to think himself beyond fault and strong enough to never falter in his faith, he now has to admit how easily he

found himself disowning the man he claimed to follow unto death. A denial that he makes not once, not even twice, but three times.

We can only imagine how Peter must have felt in that moment. In his moment of shame, could he have felt like he was no longer worthy to be the rock upon whom Jesus would build His church and give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to (Matthew 16:18-19)? Or perhaps, could he have felt like he is now no longer worthy of being loved by Jesus? In our own moments of sinfulness, the enemy does not miss the opportunity to tempt us into despair and self-condemnation; into feeling like we have completely self-sabotaged the blessings and the mission which God bestows upon us, and into feeling like we are no longer deserving of God’s love.

But who among us could ever merit God’s love for ourselves? The cross is our most tangible reminder that mercy is given to us not because we deserve it, but precisely because we don’t. When we truly come to appreciate how generous the Lord is with His mercy, it may be unfathomable to us. How could God love and forgive me in my wretchedness, so simply and so unconditionally? Some may even find it utterly scandalous – but this is the Good News. God’s mercy is neither merited

nor deserved, and He does not need or expect us to earn His love. He only asks of one thing from us: To repent and to believe the Good News, that Jesus Christ has come to save us.

We may never know whether Peter's weeping was out of despair or repentance and contrition, but one thing is certain: Brought face to face with the reality of his own brokenness, Peter had to come to the realisation that he, too, is in need of a Saviour. Hours after Peter realises this, he will see his Saviour making His way out; with bruises and open wounds on His body, a cross too heavy for Him to carry without falling, and a firm determination to persevere until Calvary. He endures all of this to win forgiveness and salvation for a man who has just forsaken Him; to win forgiveness and salvation for each and every one of us, even when we find

ourselves falling into sin again and again.

The truth is that there is nothing about us that is hidden from Jesus. He knows best how we are made for love and goodness, but He also knows our capacity to betray Him. This calls to mind what St Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: "*We were still helpless when at his appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die even for a good man – though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die – but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.*" (Romans 5:6-8). On this day, let us spend some time to ponder on how we react to our own brokenness, and what that reveals to us about how we perceive and receive God's love.

reflection questions:

- We read in the above passage that immediately after Peter's threefold denial, the Lord turned and looked straight at him. How do you perceive Jesus looking at you in moments when your sinfulness/brokenness are revealed (is it a look of judgement and condemnation, or of tenderness and love)?
- Often, we are tempted to hide the broken, wounded and ugly parts of ourselves from Him. What has the season of Lent revealed to me about my sinfulness and brokenness, and what does the Lord speak into that?
- Reflect today on what this means to you – "*... what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.*"

Wednesday OF HOLY WEEK

Gospel Reading

One of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the passover?' 'Go to so-and-so in the city' he replied 'and say to him, "The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples."' The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover.

Matthew 26:14-25

When evening came he was at table with the twelve disciples. And while they were eating he said 'I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me.' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not I, Lord, surely?' He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me, will betray me. The Son of Man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' Judas, who was to betray him; asked in his turn, 'Not I, Rabbi, surely?' 'They are your own words' answered Jesus.



reflection.

“Not I, Rabbi, surely?”

It would be interesting to consider what may have gone through Judas’ mind as he said these words to Jesus. Was it meant to be a scathing remark, or was he afraid of what Jesus might do if he found out who the betrayer was? Or perhaps this is the more curious question for us: How does a man who willingly followed Jesus for 3 years, who walked in proximity with Him as He healed the sick and fed the thousands, become the very person to deliver Him into the hands of His executioners?

We can gather some pieces as to why Judas chose to betray Jesus from what the Gospels tell us about him. As we read on Monday, we are told that Judas was a ‘thief’ who helped himself to the common fund. In the Bread of Life discourse (John 6), we read that many of His disciples could not accept His teaching, and that “Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray him” (v.64); “He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was to betray him” (v.71). We know as well that the chief priests and Pharisees had given their orders for Jesus to be reported so that they could arrest him – could it have been possible that Judas was just trying to find a way out of being implicated?

As for us, when we think about how Judas betrayed our Lord, do we find ourselves instinctively dissociating ourselves from him? It’s hard to imagine how any of us would want to identify ourselves with a ‘thief’ who helped himself to the common fund, and especially not with someone who will always be known as the man who betrayed our Lord. As disciples who love and follow Jesus, we might even find ourselves thinking, ‘How despicable! I could never do what Judas did to Jesus’.

But the difficult truth about each of us is that we, too, have the ability to trade Jesus in for our own sake. We may not know the exact reason that led Judas to his betrayal, but what we do know is the price that he put on it: 30 silver pieces. For Judas, the extent of his greed and self-interest led him to trade his Saviour in for a mere 30 silver pieces. And yet, how many of us have traded Jesus in for far less? Each time we choose to prioritise our selfish desires over what is good, true and holy, each time we give in to temptation and choose to act on our sinful impulses, each time we turn to our unhealthy coping mechanisms to grasp at instant gratification and satiation; each time, we are listening to the voice of the little ‘Judas’ in our hearts which tempts us to live out of fear and self-interest. The patterns of our lives will

reveal to us the state of our hearts – when we look into our own hearts, what will we discover there?

These are the very struggles that cannot be overcome by our own strength, but only by surrender and the gift of God's grace. And yet, it is not easy to let go of these when we are unsure about who we are surrendering these to. While the other disciples address Jesus as 'Lord', we see that Judas calls him 'Rabbi' (meaning teacher). To trade his teacher in for 30 silver pieces may have been a worthy deal for Judas, but if he had only come to see and believe that Jesus was his Lord, how might he have chosen differently?

So too for us; who is Jesus to us, really?

We have to be honest with ourselves about this if we desire to let God restore our broken images of Him, for we can only love Him truly if we know Him truly. And when we come to know Him truly, we will see with clarity that the Lordship of Jesus is not one of tyranny or authoritarianism – His is a Lordship of love, which frees us from the bonds of our selfishness and self-reliance and invites us to trust in His care and providence.

Today, let us pray especially for the courage to be honest and open with Jesus as we reflect on the areas in our lives which we need to surrender to Him. He holds us with gentleness and love, always.

reflection questions:

- Am I aware of the ways in which I'm driven by fear or selfishness?
 - Who is Jesus to me – is He the Lord of my life, or do I view Him as someone less?
 - If you struggle to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord of your life, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if there are any fears in your heart that hinder you from proclaiming this. What does God speak into these fears?
-

“In his self-offering on the Cross, Jesus, as it were, brings all the sin of the world deep *within the love of God* and wipes it away.”

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Maundy THURSDAY

Gospel Reading

John 13:1-15

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was.

They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

'Never!' said Peter 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in

common with me.' 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are.'

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'



reflection.

How do you perceive God's mercy to be? Before we consider today's Gospel, let's briefly call to mind the parable of the prodigal son from the Gospel of Luke. After the younger son squanders his entire fortune and finds himself in destitution and hunger, he resolves to return to his father's house – but not with hopes to regain his place as the father's son:

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.” (Luke 15:18-19)

How could he expect anything more? It was probably unthinkable for him to expect that he could be treated as the son of his father again after what he had done against him. Caught in the gravity of his sin and unworthiness, he could only imagine being received as a hired servant. Henri Nouwen describes it this way, “There is repentance, but not a repentance in the light of the immense love of a forgiving God. ... While God wants to restore me to the full dignity of sonship, I keep insisting that I will settle for being a hired servant.” (From *The Return of the Prodigal Son*)

Most of us are familiar with how the story ends. The younger son finds himself being embraced by the father,

and immediately received into the household once again as a member of the family. For the younger son, upon receiving a most tangible act of mercy, he has come to experience his father's love in a way he couldn't even dare to imagine.

So too in today's Gospel, the disciples find themselves stunned into silence as Jesus bends before them to wash their feet. We read that Peter is the one to speak up and to protest: ‘Never!’ said Peter ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Peter knows well that it is the role of a servant, not a master, to wash the feet of the guests; his initial protest is born out of his conviction that Jesus is the master who should not be subject to assuming the role of a servant.

In a way, Peter's resistance isn't completely unfounded – Jesus is the Christ, and even John the Baptist declares that he is “not fit to undo the strap of His sandals” (Luke 3:16). How could any of us then, sinful and unworthy as we are, allow Him who is all-powerful to humble Himself before us like this?

Here in the upper room, Jesus challenges the disciples' (and our) ideas of greatness and power. The disciples are not new to His teachings on

servanthood (Matthew 20:26-27; 23:11-12) and self-emptying love (John 15:13). Yet on this night while His heart weighs with the knowledge of the impending Passion, they can't help but argue again about who amongst them is the greatest (Luke 22:24). In response to this, Jesus – who Himself is the King of kings – gets up from the table, wraps a towel around His waist, and washes their feet with the towel He is wearing.

If we place ourselves in the disciples' shoes in this scene, we may begin to empathise with how uncomfortable this must have been for them. The profound humility of our Lord in this moment stands in direct contrast to their pride and desire for vainglory; His kindness and self-emptying love in direct contrast to their selfishness. Perhaps you have experienced before how someone else's generosity can sometimes make us acutely aware of the generosity which we lack in our own hearts – in a similar way, have you ever felt so acutely conscious of your own sinfulness, that it almost feels like you don't deserve to be brought before God who is sheer goodness? Has this thought ever made you hold yourself back from reconciliation with Him, because it is incomprehensible to you that God could forgive you again even after you keep falling into the same sins?

Whenever we hesitate to receive reconciliation and forgiveness from God, we mirror Peter's resistance when he refuses to let Jesus wash his feet. When we believe that we need to 'work on ourselves' before we can show ourselves before God, we echo the script of the younger son as he prepares to offer himself as a hired hand earning his keep, instead of returning as a son who needs to be held and loved by his father.

Jesus teaches us today that our self-sufficiency cannot save us, for He has to be the one to cleanse us from our sins if we are to share in the divine life with Him. And He helps us to recognise anew that His power is of a different kind: it consists of an unfathomable, unconditional and total self-giving love which never tires of forgiving us and drawing us into reconciliation with Him.

Having received such a tireless love, let us then never tire of asking for forgiveness, for we can be free to respond in this way: *“Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help.”* (Hebrews 4:16).

True humility on our part does not require us to strive for or to earn any measure of this forgiveness by ourselves; rather, it consists of simply acknowledging our frailty and our need for His saving love, and to let that recognition lead us running right into

the arms of Mercy time and time again. We can then seek to make the prayer of the psalmist the assurance of our own hearts: *“O purify me, then I shall be clean; O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow. ... [For] a humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn.”* (Psalm 51:7,17).

reflection questions:

- What is your response to the image of Jesus bending down to wash your feet?
 - Is there an area in your life that you seek forgiveness in?
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Maundy THURSDAY

A reflection for the night vigil.

Gospel Reading

Then Jesus came with them to a small estate called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Stay here while I go over there to pray'. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him. And sadness came over him, and great distress. Then he said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and keep awake with me.' And going on a little further he fell on his face and prayed. 'My Father,' he said 'if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it.'

He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, 'So you had not the strength to keep awake with me one hour?

Matthew 26:36-46

You should be awake, and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, a second time, he went away and prayed: 'My Father,' he said 'if this cup cannot pass by without my drinking it, your will be done!' And he came back again and found them sleeping, their eyes were so heavy. Leaving them there, he went away again and prayed for the third time, repeating the same words. Then he came back to the disciples and said to them, 'You can sleep on now and take your rest. Now the hour has come when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let us go! My betrayer is already close at hand.'



“Wait here and keep awake with me.”

reflection.

“In that hour, Jesus felt the need to pray and to have with him his disciples, his friends, those who had followed him and shared most closely in his mission. But here, at Gethsemane, following him became difficult and uncertain; they were overcome by doubt, weariness and fright. As the events of Jesus’ passion rapidly unfolded, the disciples would adopt different attitudes before the Master: attitudes of closeness, distance, hesitation.

Each of us might do well to ask: Who am I, before the sufferings of my Lord?”
(Pope Francis)

This night is not like any other night for Jesus – He knows that He will soon be betrayed by a kiss of a friend, taken into custody and tortured, and be sentenced

to the most cruel execution known to the people of His time. The knowledge of what is to come brings Him intense agony, and in this moment of deep anguish He asks just one thing of His friends: *Wait here and keep awake with me.*

His disciples must have sensed that something was different on this night. The air is heavy with a sense of foreboding, and there is a deep sorrow in Jesus’ voice as He asks them to stay by His side and pray as they wait for Him to return. Yet they find themselves still unable to keep awake; try as they might, they can’t help but give in to their fatigue.

How do we imagine ourselves in this scene? Are we tired and weary, or

frustrated with the waiting? Are we confused and apprehensive about what is happening or about what is to come? Or are we patient and still, firmly but trustfully waiting by the Lord's side?

We may never be able to fully understand the anguish that Jesus suffers here in the Garden of

Gethsemane, and perhaps at a time like this, there is little we can say or do to alleviate His pain. But we can on this night offer Him the simple and humble gift of our presence. Let us then, as He asked, keep watch by His side with faithfulness and silence. To stay with Him is all that He asks of us.

Good FRIDAY



Gospel Reading

Like a sapling he grew up in front of us,
like a root in arid ground.
Without beauty, without majesty we saw
him, no looks to attract our eyes;
a thing despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and familiar
with suffering, a man to make people
screen their faces; he was despised
and we took no account of him.

Isaiah 53:2-5

And yet ours were the sufferings he
bore, ours the sorrows he carried.
But we, we thought of him as someone
punished, struck by God, and brought
low. Yet he was pierced through for our
faults, crushed for our sins.
On him lies a punishment that brings us
peace, and through his wounds we are
healed.

reflection.

When you turn your gaze to the image of the crucified Jesus, what do you see?

The words of the Prophet Isaiah in today's First Reading is personified in Jesus' wounded, beaten and bloodied body hanging on the wood of the cross – Without beauty, without majesty we saw him, no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men. It is not easy to look upon the bleeding wounds of another; our instinct is probably to recoil at the mere sight of the gore of it. But how about when we look upon the bleeding wounds of another, fully knowing that they were only inflicted because of us, because of something we had done?

Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. For this reason, each of us has a deep and personal connection to the Passion narrative: The wounds which are inflicted on Jesus today are the very wounds of sin which we carry in our own souls. In His distress in Gethsemane, when His sweat was bathed in blood, His prayer for the Father's will to be done makes reparation for all the ways in which we have rejected God's will for our lives. At the scourging at the pillar, Jesus bears in His flesh the sins of ours, offering expiation for every sin of impurity we have committed.

At the crowning with thorns, He accepts the humiliation in reparation for our stubborn pride; as He carries the heavy cross on His battered and frail body, He offers atonement for our infidelities and lack of perseverance in the faith. And as He is nailed to the cross and takes His last breath, He pays the price for the wages of our sins, so that He may offer full redemption to us and open the door to eternal life. The image of His wounds mirrors ours.

And yet, Isaiah makes such a mysterious statement: *through his wounds we are healed.* Why does it take such pain and suffering to be inflicted on our Lord in order for ours to be healed? Let us consider this for a moment – if the wounds which Jesus bears at His death mirror ours, so too, these are the same marks which He will carry on His resurrected and glorified body. This is a sure sign of hope for us; that when we unite our wounds and our suffering with His, He will not leave us to remain in our state of brokenness. Through His death *and* His resurrection Jesus shows us that He is not ashamed or afraid of what is ugly or despicable in us, because His love has the power to transform even what we consider to be the most shameful and despicable parts of ourselves. His love can convert evil into good, and our sorrow into joy.

When we let His love meet us in our vulnerability, when we come to witness the ways in which His love heals, transforms, and shines light through the holes of our wounds, we will be led to share in the amazement of St Augustine as he spoke these words: In my deepest wound I saw your glory, and it dazzled me.

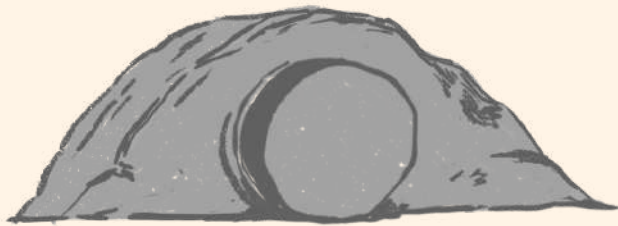
“It is not merely that we see the good and beautiful, avoiding the ugly or

despicable. Rather we see the ugly and despicable as beautiful because God’s love dwells precisely in weakness.” (Ilia Delio, from *A Heart Full of Love*). As we contemplate on the image of the crucified Jesus today, instead of seeing our crucified Lord as “*a thing [to be] despised and rejected by men*”, let us behold Him and pray for the grace to marvel in our hearts at the beauty of the cross.

reflection questions:

- What does the message of the Prophet Isaiah mean to you, “*by his wounds we are healed*”?
 - Spend some time contemplating on this image today: Moments after Jesus takes His last breath, the crowds disperse and silence fills the atmosphere. Place yourself here in the scene at the foot of the cross, looking upon our crucified Lord. What does Jesus speak into your heart in this moment? What do you desire to say to Him?
 - We invite you to write a letter of thanksgiving and gratitude to Jesus today.
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Holy SATURDAY



reflection.

“Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep.” (From the Second Reading from the Office of Readings for Holy Saturday).

Is silence in waiting uncomfortable for you? There is a restlessness in our hearts which often makes waiting difficult. Just think, for example, about how restless it makes you feel when you find out that your next bus is a 20 minutes' wait away.

Even more so, when we are asked to wait without the certainty of knowing *what* is to come or *when* it will come – this surfaces a kind of uneasiness in us. Are we foolish for expecting something to happen when we don't know for sure if it ever will? Going back to the bus analogy:

If we have been sitting at a bus stop for a long time without knowing when the next bus will arrive, would it not be easier (more realistic, even) to get up and go, and find another route to take?

For many of us, Holy Saturday is the uncomfortable in-between of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The shock and gore of the Passion may be behind us, but reality dawns upon us today that our Lord has been put to death, and the loss brings a heavy silence with it. What happens now? Today, let us call to mind some of the words which Jesus had said before He died:

“Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19)

“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)

For the disciples, these promises which Jesus made must have been perplexing. The man they put their hope in, the man they thought to be the Messiah, is now dead. They knew Him to be a trustworthy person, and yet it was now (seemingly) impossible for any of His promises to be fulfilled. Should they continue to wait and to hope, or were those words merely empty promises? What should they even wait for?

Even now for us, in the landscape of our own lives, every one of us is waiting for something. Maybe you are waiting for healing from a wound which continues to bring you pain, or for deliverance from a habitual sin which you still feel chained by.

Maybe you are waiting for a breakthrough in the life of a loved one whom you have been praying for, for a long time. Or maybe you are waiting for the Lord’s answer to a question which weighs on your heart, but He has not given you a response yet.

Because you trust that God’s promises are true, you desire to wait patiently and to witness His plan unfold – but how difficult it is to wait well! How difficult it is to not grow weary of waiting, especially when there is no clear roadmap or timeline before us. At times, it is almost easier to yield to the temptation of hopelessness.

Our seasons of waiting all look different, but there is a common invitation for us: To wait with hope, and with expectant joy in our hearts – not solely in knowing that there is something good which awaits us, but also that there is something good to rejoice over *right now*, even in the thick of the waiting. If we begin to truly believe that nothing is wasted with God, we will come to appreciate that He breathes purpose and movement into all our ‘in-between’ seasons. And we will be moved to a deeper trust, in our hearts, that God’s silence does not mean that He is inactive. Something is unfolding with every moment, even if it remains unseen by us right now.

So too, there is something deeply sacred about the silence and stillness of Holy Saturday. To enter into the silence of Holy Saturday is to allow the waiting to stretch us in our faithfulness and longing – to grow in patience as we wait for God to reveal His ways to us; and to sit until the restlessness falls away. Rather than allow this day to merely pass us by, let's ask ourselves how we can create the space in our hearts to sit with the silence, and to wait by our Lord's side watchfully. It is only when we are close to the Lord that we are able to wait with hope, for He is the only wellspring from whom we can draw strength to keep on wrestling against hopelessness, and to see that it

is never so much about what we are waiting for, as it is about Who we are waiting on. The One who asks us to wait is faithful, and He makes all things beautiful in His time.

Unlike the disciples, we have the privilege of knowing what comes after Holy Saturday. We know that death is not the end, and that the waiting doesn't last forever. So let us pray not to grow weary of the silence or the waiting, for new life is about to spring forth soon. Tomorrow, the stone will be rolled away from the tomb. Easter is our surest sign that our hope leads us somewhere, and not just anywhere – it leads us to resurrection.

reflection questions:

- What are the prayers of my heart which I'm still waiting for the Lord to answer – what is my disposition as I wait on Him? Where in my life do I need a new outpouring of hope?
- What can you do today to help you enter more deeply into the silence of Holy Saturday?

*“Our soul is waiting for the Lord.
The Lord is our help and our shield.
May your love be upon us, O Lord,
as we place all our hope in you.”*

Psalm 33:20,22

Easter SUNDAY

Gospel Reading

John 20:1-9

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.'

So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent

down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.



reflection.

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb’ she said ‘and we don’t know where they have put him.”

What would your first thought be when you see an empty tomb? Mary of Magdala’s response makes perfect sense: All she knew was that just yesterday, the body of her Lord was still lying in the tomb. Now that He is no longer there, someone must have taken Him away.

And yet, we read that someone else had a different response. *“Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed.”* It is no minor miracle that the other disciple was moved to believe in the resurrection the very moment he saw that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. The gift of faith is a divine grace which draws us beyond the limits of our human understanding – often, our instinct is to seek what seems most realistic and comprehensible to us. Like Mary of Magdala, until Jesus stood before her and called her by name (John 20:14-16), all she could fathom in the moment was that the body of her Lord had been taken away. And as for Thomas, who was one of the twelve disciples, even the accounts of the resurrection from other disciples were not enough for him; he had to see the

resurrected body of Jesus for himself before he believed (John 20:24-28).

How many of us truly share the simple and childlike faith of the beloved disciple at the sight of the empty tomb? Childlikeness does not ask of us to adopt a childish or immature faith; rather, what it invites us to is a decisiveness to lay down our scepticism and our grasping to understand – to lay these down in the hands of a loving Father, who asks us to put our faith in Him. Such a childlike faith is what Jesus speaks about when He says these words to Thomas: *“You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”* (John 20:29) The gift of faith unlocks the chains of doubt over our hearts, and grants our hearts the freedom to be amazed at the miracle of the resurrection. How precious it is to receive this gift! On this Easter Sunday, let us raise our hearts to the Lord with gratitude for the gift of faith which He has given to each of us.

Let’s also take some time to consider today what the resurrection means for us, in a most personal way. Easter may have arrived, but for some of us, maybe it still feels like we have not yet left the tomb. The tombs of our lives hold painful and dark realities for us.

These could be the loss of someone or something we cherish dearly, the difficult memory of having been deeply hurt by someone, the weight of a strained relationship, or the shame and guilt we bear from the mistakes we have made before. When these painful areas come to mind with no answer or full closure yet, does the joy of the resurrection almost feel beyond reach for us?

Friends, today this truth is proclaimed over us anew: Jesus died and resurrected to breathe new life into the very areas that pain us the most. The resurrection is God's promise that nothing ends in death for us – it brings to reality the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “... *to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness*

instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.” (Isaiah 61:3). The joy of Easter does not demand that we hide away or pretend that our heartaches no longer afflict us. Rather, it is the gentle voice which speaks these words tenderly into our pain: “*Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*” (Psalm 30:5)

As we enter into the new season of Easter, may our hearts be filled with new hope that springtime has begun for us, for He will turn all our graves into gardens. Jesus Christ has risen, so let us sing aloud our Easter song with joy: Alleluia, alleluia!

reflection questions:

- What does the ‘tomb’ of your life look like – what loss, pain, or struggle does it hold in your current season? How can you claim the gift of the resurrection over these areas in your life this Easter?
 - How can I share in the joy of the resurrection during the Easter season?
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“We are an Easter people,
and *Alleluia* is our song!”

SAINT JOHN PAUL THE GREAT



Office for Young People

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