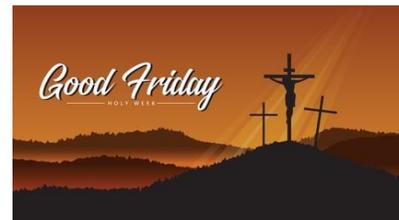


Grace Notes

Friday, April 2nd, 2021



Today, as I attended Good Friday services, I could not help but listen to the account of Peter in the courtyard, denying Jesus three times as told by St John the Evangelist, and tying it to our Theological Theme. Perhaps because of the quietness of the church and the restrictions of our Covid-induced isolation, I found myself far more emotionally-affected by this reading today than I might normally have been and started reflecting on how my actions on many occasions may have been a denial of my choice to follow Jesus. This story gives particular meaning to Jesus' question, "Peter, do you love me?" on the beach after the Resurrection, the focus of our Theological Theme. This is perhaps the most powerful indication of forgiveness extended by Jesus to one who had denied him. But it carries the responsibility to "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs." Each one of us by virtue of our baptism into the Body of Christ has received a mandate from Jesus: we all have the dignity of belonging to the royal priesthood of all the baptised, to be prophetic people and take care of the Good Shepherd's flock, to love one another as Christ has loved us. Feeding the sheep and the lambs tasks us with taking care of the physical needs of those around us; in the words of St Teresa of Avila, "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours." However, our responsibility doesn't stop there: feeding the sheep and lambs also includes our call to share spiritual food and to encourage others to seek it out. Just as we need to nourish our bodies in order to do physical work in support of others, we need to feed our souls to be able to share spiritual strength.

As today, much of tomorrow will feel odd, especially if we venture into a church, seeing the empty tabernacle and the altar stripped of its linens and hangings, candles and cross. Good Friday is the only day of the year in which the Mass is not celebrated; the only communion permitted is the Communion of the Presanctified with bread consecrated on Holy Thursday. Holy Saturday starts feeling just as empty and then, after the initial light from the Easter fire and the Paschal candle after nightfall, bursts into the joy with which we proclaim the Exsultet and later the Gloria. The Easter Vigil liturgy is the highpoint of



our Church Year, the liturgy reflected in all our other Masses. The Liturgy of the Word leads us through salvation history from Creation to the Resurrection, a fitting way to welcome those receiving Sacraments of Initiation; that they will also be present at the Liturgy of the Eucharist to receive Christ in the form of transubstantiated bread and wine for the first time makes this an occasion without equal. This year we may be constrained in some of the ways we celebrate, such as taking baskets of food to the church for blessing on Holy Saturday, or gathering with our extended families on Easter Sunday; however, nothing can suppress the Good News that “Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!”



The Octave of Easter which follows re-members – brings alive again – the stories we know so well: of Mary Magdalene rushing from the tomb to share her news, of the disciples walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (reflected in our Bishops' document on Catholic Education, **Renewing the Promise**), of breakfast shared with Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias. We need to make sure that our familiarity with these accounts does not diminish our joy, nor the excitement with which we share the Good News with others, especially our children! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09azEfx71rc>

Last Sunday we were shouting, “Hosanna” – in its original Hebrew form, הושענא **Hoshana**, a shout of respect for the expected **melekh mashiach** (מלך המשיח, 'King Messiah'), the descendent of David who is to save the people; this Sunday we unearth the “Alleluia” of gratitude and adoration we buried on Shrove Tuesday in recognition that the Messiah is among us.

As Pope St John Paul II said in an address in Harlem, New York, in 1979, “We are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song.” Easter is not just one day but a period fifty days in length lasting until Pentecost, during which we are called to keep the joy alive and the Alleluias resounding in the message we share in our witness and in our words. We may have to work at it a little harder this year as we deal with the disappointment of not being able to be with all those we love. Let's look for new ways to celebrate and share our joy in the knowledge that we are indeed an Easter people and that Christ is risen indeed! Blessed are we!



Gillian