

"Putting the Paschal Mystery at the centre of our lives means feeling compassion towards the wounds of the crucified Christ present in the many innocent victims of wars, in attacks on life, from that of the unborn to that of the elderly, and various forms of violence". This means being personally committed to and involved in "the building of a better world".

Pope Francis



## The Year of the Word: Reflection 8

In the final week of Lent we recall the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and we hear the story of the passion, before we are able to celebrate the joy of the resurrection at Easter: Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, is about embracing life's challenges without looking for approval. God sees – and that's all that matters. Few people praise the donkey which carried Jesus. The events following Palm Sunday lead us to 'Good Friday,' part of the Easter Triduum and ultimately to Easter Sunday completing the Paschal Mystery – Jesus' Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

Why should we remember the passion of Jesus? Why keep alive the memory of such anguish and pain? Aren't we supposed to forget about past pain and hurts, and let them disappear if they can?

As Christians we are committed to be a people that remembers the passion of Jesus: "Whenever you do this, do it in memory of me." When a community chooses to remember suffering, its memory becomes a protest. Remembrance of pain demands a future that is more than a repetition of the past. That is why the memory of suffering is dangerous: in recalling the suffering of the victim there is a protest that this should not be repeated again. That memory also serves to make us aware of the crosses that are in our midst. The memory of Jesus' passion educates us to pay attention to the suffering of others. The cross demands that attention should be paid. So we pay attention to the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of all who are victims of hate and violence. We all know the unsung heroes and heroines, the uncanonised saints who have transformed the lives of those around them and stood up for what is right and just. Those who "blow their own trumpet" have usually done very little for others.

So as we prepare to remember the passion of Jesus and to enter its mystery, we should remember that we hold holy the love that opposed violence and the love that endured violence, the love that made its way with a cross on its back. We profess our gratitude for that love and to stand in solidarity with all those people whose courageous love makes them victims of violence. The cross of Jesus has not been dismantled; the suffering he experienced has not ceased. The cross stands in the midst of life – not as ritual decoration, but as a reminder that this is the price the world exacts from those who confront its ways with the values of the Gospel.

Could Jesus have avoided the cross? Could he have made a detour around Calvary and continued on his way? Could he not have evaded execution and settled for a quiet existence beside the Sea of Galilee? Did his forgiving love require the cross?

It was not Jesus who looked for the cross; it was the world that looked to the cross as the way to eliminate him. The cross was not the idea of the Father; it was the final solution thought up by a world opposed to Jesus' way. God the Father is not a sadist who planned the destruction of his beloved Son; in letting go of his Son the Father had to be vulnerable to what would happen to his Son at the hands of others: All parents have to take that risk. God the Father; no less, did likewise. As God is always engaged in a "dialogue of salvation with man", despite humanities weaknesses and failings, This desire to save Man "led the Father to burden His Son with the weight of our sins, thus, in the expression of Pope Benedict XVI, 'turning of God against Himself' (Deus caritas est, 12)" in order to experience "the mercy He freely gives us", even if it appears strange to us. For surely, God doesn't forgive as easily as that? Yet mercy is a sheer gift, it does not have to be earned or deserved, it is the largesse of the benefactor to grant as they see fit. Mercy cancels out wrongs and transgressions – not because a sparkling defence has been found or excusing causes have been skilfully argued, but because that is the free response of the person who is grieved. Mercy does not suggest that the guilty are not guilty: it recognises the guilt but does not demand satisfaction for the wrong. In all this, mercy reflects the utter graciousness of the one who has been wronged.

Can we forgive as readily as God or Jesus forgives? Or do we dote on people's wrongdoing, reminding them of past failures, and lighting vigil lamps to their mistakes? Can we forgive and leave it? We spend time wondering whether God can really forgive without hoarding the hurt. God's track record on forgiveness is clear: God's had lots of practice and God is good at it. How about our track record?

Love does not demand the cross, but in the life of Jesus love ends up on the cross. That is what actually happened. That is what continues to happen to self-forgetful love. Love chooses not to avoid the suffering that emerges from its commitment. The avoidance of suffering is not love's governing passion. It cannot be. Jesus could have avoided going to Jerusalem; he could have taken the advice of the disciples who warned him about the fate that would surely befall him there. But instead of avoiding Jerusalem, Jesus enters it publicly and loudly. He does not disguise himself and slip in through a quiet gate; he heads a parade. He decides to confront the power that is set against him. And when he chooses to do that, like all people who confront oppression, he makes suffering visible. "It is part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces." (Theodor Adorno) Jesus brings suffering to the forefront. For Jesus to have avoided suffering, he would have had to avoid confrontation with the authorities. He would have had to suppress the real suffering of people and settle for the conspiracy of silence. That he refused to do. His love makes itself vulnerable to suffering. He could only have removed himself from suffering by keeping himself untouched by other people's pain, by making himself invulnerable, by removing himself from human relationships. But that was not why he had come. He had not come to be a mobile monument in stone; he was God's love in fragile human flesh and bone. He was God's passion, God's overwhelming love, God's risky adventure.

Easter Sunday brings all God's plans to conclusion. What a culmination! What a reward! Jesus' resurrection from the dead and victory over sin brings us the greatest reason to celebrate. Truly God's mercy is shown to mankind for eternal life is restored to man if only they believe! "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

So, the Paschal Mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all justification that reinstates us to God's grace, 'so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; we too might walk in newness of life.'" God has sent us a light in the dark to guide us, protect us and strengthen us. Is that really a gift anyone would want to turn away from?



### Readings for Reflection from the Gospels

Matthew 21:1-11 Palm Sunday  
Matthew 26:24-25 The Last Supper  
Matthew 26:36 - 75 The Mount of Olives and after  
Matthew 27: 4:5-56 The Passion



#### Prayer

"Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others; The light, O Jesus will be all from you; none of it will be mine; It will be you, shining on others through me."

John Henry Newman

## A Time for Everything

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

#### Blessings

May the Lord mark us this day and all our days with the blessing of his peace.  
When we are tired and vulnerable,  
may he enliven us with new purpose.  
When we are unsure and distrustful,  
may he fortify us with new confidence.  
When we are depressed and weighed down,  
may he raise us to new heights.  
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

May the love of the Father enfold us,  
the passion of the Son embolden us,  
the fire of the Spirit enliven us;  
and may the blessing of God rest upon us  
and abide with us evermore.

Amen.

