

Gratitude Foundation



***“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”***

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Holy Week Reflections

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Holy Thursday

Reflection

On the evening of Holy Thursday, we celebrate the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus at the Last Supper. Many would call this the first Eucharist of the Church. I would argue that the Church was born from the side of Christ pierced by the lance on Good Friday. Therefore, I would contend that the First Eucharist of the Church occurred on the road to Emmaus that first Easter Sunday.

The Eucharist fulfills the promise of God to share His life with us, to give us His Only Son as proclaimed in John 3:16: "For God so love the world that He gave His only Son..." Out of love God chooses to share His life with us. The Eucharist is the gift of, the sharing of, His divine life. It is Jesus, body, blood, soul, and divinity on the altar, in our hands, on our lips and in our hearts. At the Last Supper Jesus spoke of His indwelling, abiding presence. That gift is fulfilled in many ways but in a most real and substantial way in the Eucharist.

To begin to understand the gift of the Eucharist it is imperative to reflect on the power of God's word. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God spoke and everything came into being from nothing. Throughout Sacred Scripture we see the power of God's word to effect change. When time was right the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. When Jesus spoke, things happened. When he said, "Little girl arise," the little girl rose for the dead. When He said, "Lazareth come out," the young man who had been dead and buried for four days walked out of the tomb. When Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, through whom everything came into being, takes the bread and says, "This is My Body," the bread becomes His Body. When Jesus takes the chalice filled with wine and water and says, "This is My Blood," then the wine and the water become His Blood. When Jesus said to the apostles, "Do this in remembrance of Me," He is commanding and in fact ordaining them and empowering them to do the same.

To aide our understanding of the Eucharist it is also important to understand the Jewish connotation of remembrance. It is much more profound than what the English word remembrance captures. The Jewish understanding is better articulated by the underlying Greek word *anamnesis*. *Anamnesis* means to make present again what once was. For example, when the Jews celebrate Passover, they reenact the original experience. They dress for the occasion with walking stick in hand. They make present again the saving act of God such that the those who were not there can experience it. Every time we gather around the altar to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we make present again the Last Supper so that we may partake of the one bread and the one chalice. We make present again the Sacrifice of Calvary and we are there at the foot of the Cross. The blood and the water that flowed from the pierced side of Christ flows over us to wash us clean in the blood of the Lamb.

The Last Supper and the Cross of Calvary cannot be separated, they are one. In the Mass both are present simultaneously. Before the Pascal Mystery of Jesus there were multiple sacrifices offered every day. Now there is one sacrifice to end all sacrifices. At every Mass we make present again the Last Supper and the one sacrifice of Calvary.

The Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist, "The Source and Summit of our Faith." It is the source of our faith in that it is God sharing His divine life with us. He is the source of all that is and ever will be. God is the giver and sustainer of life. Out of love God choses to share His life with us. The real and substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is the fulfillment of His promise of His indwelling presence and is therefore the summit of our Faith, the gift of eternal life.

In Christ,



Holy Thursday

Personal Witness

I was blessed as a child to be immersed in a very devout Catholic family. When I say that I am talking about parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. Our family of six children took up an entire pew in church, but then there were grandparents and several pews of aunts and uncles and cousins that took up several additional pews. There is a popular expression that states, "Faith is caught, not taught." I caught my faith as a child. I memorized the Baltimore Catechism, but I don't know how much I understood. Whereas my faith was passed on to me by the entirety of my extended family, my faith was caught from my grandfather. Being his first and favorite grandson we were particularly close. Seeing his faith in his face and in his words and in his actions was contagious. His reverence and piety at the celebration of Holy Mass left me with little doubt as to the real and substantial presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

He and grandma owned a small country general merchandise store. For many years grandpa drove the school bus for the rural grammar school that we attended. After the morning run, he would serve the 8 a.m. daily Mass at the Catholic Church about a block from the school. Then he would work the store until the after-school bus route.

On Saturday mornings during the school year, I would attend catechism class at school. It was taught by a group of devout sisters from a neighboring town. I recall memorizing the Baltimore Catechism. My book was filled with stars signifying my accomplishments. I was able to memorize well, but I understood very little. Nonetheless, I learned that God loved me and that He made me to love and serve Him in this life and be with Him forever in the next. Intellectually I understood that much. When I received my First Communion, I had no doubt that it was Jesus that I was receiving.

After catechism class I would walk over to my grandparent's store about two blocks down the road. My job was to help stock the shelves. As I was doing that grandpa was filling boxes with groceries to be delivered. He would fill the back seat and the trunk of his big Buick and then we would be off delivering groceries. Our travels took us down some very rough backroads in a very rural area. On more than one occasion we got the Buick stuck on the muddy roads. Some of the homes that we visited were old trailers and dilapidated old houses. I found out later in life, after grandpa had passed away, that he most often did not charge for the groceries that he delivered. Often, he would tell them that he would send them the bill, but never did. My grandmother who was the bookkeeper had a difficult time balancing the books.

Grandpa died on Good Friday, 1975. At his wake and funeral, the following week, I was overwhelmed by people who came up to me and shared stories about how grandpa had helped them out. I heard stories of fathers who were temporarily unemployed for a variety of reasons, some who were suffering from injury or chronic illness, families who were just down and out and grandpa helped them through a dark and difficult time. At his funeral there were people standing in the isles of church and in the vestibule. It was a testament to how many lives he had touched. I learned more about God from my grandpa than all those years of catechism class, Catholic high school, and 5 years of seminary training. He lived the gospel. For him the Eucharist was a verb. He lived the Eucharist with his life, he put on the heart and mind of Jesus, he put a towel around his waist and washed some feet. From him I caught my faith and I am eternally grateful. Thanks gramps!

In Christ,



Good Friday

Reflection

Today we commemorate the Passion of our Lord. The very word “passion” connotes a pain or an agony of the heart. As Jesus experiences the agony in the garden He exclaims, “My soul is sorrowful unto death.” (Mk 14:34). As painful as the physical crucifixion must have been the pain of the denial, betrayal and abandonment must have been even more excruciating for Jesus.

We all have experienced the pain of being separated from a loved one because of death. My own family and members of our parish family have recently lost a spouse or even a child to the reality of death. The human finality of that, and the heartache that accompanies that loss can be overwhelming. The pain of that separation can be immobilizing.

It seems that just yesterday we celebrated the wonder of Christmas and the coming of our Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus was born into our human condition. He walked into the waters of the Jordan River in deep solidarity with us. He becomes one of us in all things but sin. He must share in all things including death, even death on a cross. Jesus travels to the depth of God forsakenness for us. From the agony of the cross he cries out, “My God, My God why have you forsaken Me.” (Mk 15:34) In the ancient Creed of the Church, Christians proclaimed, “He descended to the depth of hell.” Jesus goes to the depth of God forsakenness for us. He experiences real death, separation from His father’s love. He becomes separated from the life-giving breath of His Father. He, through whom all things came into being, ceases to be! He humbles Himself in order to save us.

From the cross He could hear the bystanders jeer, “Save yourself and come down from the cross.” (Mk 15:30). The chief priests and the scribes mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.” (Mk 15:31). He did not come into the world to save Himself. He came to save us! He who was without sin had no need of salvation. We sinners need a savior. Out of love for us and in obedience to the Father, Jesus remained on the cross, fastened with nails and hatred, but held there by love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (Jn 3:16). He humbled Himself to share in our humanity so that we may share in His divinity. We look back at the cross from the vantage point of the empty tomb and we give thanks, and we remember.

At the moment of His death the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. That which once separated us from God is destroyed forever. After three days of darkness and separation, God breathed His life breath back into His Son. The Spirit that Jesus surrendered from the cross now raises Him from the dead. Jesus breathed that Spirit on the apostles in the upper room that first Easter Sunday evening and poured it upon the Church at Pentecost. The same Spirit is now with us, the Lord and giver of Life. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

Yours in Christ,



Good Friday

Personal Witness

As many of you know I was a Certified Public Accountant for 19 years before entering the seminary to study for the priesthood. One of those years I found myself in Jacksonville Florida during Holy Week. We were supposed to wrap up our meetings on Wednesday, but the negotiations were not going well, and we found ourselves in rather heated meetings on Good Friday morning. A few minutes before noon I apologized, excused myself and I went looking for a church to venerate the Cross. I drove the rental car until I saw a church. It was a large church in the round. I pulled into the parking lot and ran in. It was shortly after noon.

When I arrived, they had just begun to read the Passion. It was divided into parts, and it was a very dramatic reading. They paused at the time of the scourging, and someone was cracking a whip. After that someone began pounding with a hammer on a wooden cross in the sanctuary. There were people wailing and sobbing bitterly. All these sounds were echoing throughout the church. Never had I experienced the reading of the Passion with such emotion. After the Passion ended and Jesus was buried in the tomb there was a long period of silence. Sobs and sniffing were the only sounds that could be heard.

A frail elderly pastor made his way to the ambo. He was short in stature such that he could hardly be seen standing behind the podium. In a very weak and shaky voice, he said, "It's Friday but Sunday's a coming." Then there was a long period of silence. Then in a slightly louder voice he repeated, "It's Friday but Sunday's a coming." More silence. Then in a louder voice he repeated, "It's Friday but Sunday's a coming." Someone from the back yelled out, "Preach it brother." Again, in a stronger and more confident voice he proclaimed, "It's Friday but Sunday's a coming." People started to stand and raise their hands in the air as he continued in a stronger and stronger voice to proclaim, "It's Friday but Sunday's a coming." This went on for 45 minutes to an hour. I had lost track of time.

I found myself standing on my chair with about 2,000 people waving my hands to heaven singing "Alleluia!" as he continued to proclaim, "It's Friday but Sunday's a coming." That entire congregation was transformed from mourning and tears of sadness into rejoicing and tears of joy. He brought us from the Cross to the empty tomb, from the Passion to the joy of the Resurrection, from the darkness of Good Friday to the bright light of Easter dawn. We were now looking back at the Cross through the lens of the Resurrection.

From that moment on I have always looked back at the Passion with the victory of the Resurrection in mind. The Cross once an ancient symbol of torcher and death now has become the universal symbol of life and of love. As Pope Benedict XVI once pointed out, the Crucifix is where the definition of authentic love must begin. It is the ultimate act of love in human history that we celebrate on Good Friday. We know that the Cross did not have the final word. The Cross without the Resurrection would have been a victory for satan and for darkness. But Easter Sunday changes all of that. The victory has been won. Death where is your sting?

God's grace comes pouring into the world from the pierced side of Christ. The temple veil was rent from top to bottom. Heaven's gate is opened forever. That which once separated us from God has been torn asunder. We are the Easter People, the People of the Resurrection. The Alleluia that we sing on Easter Sunday we now sing on Good Friday as well. Two thousand years have come and gone, and the Cross remains constant, the tomb remains empty, and we are still the Easter People and Alleluia is our song! Preach it with your life!

In Christ,



Easter Sunday

Reflection

Long before we were called Christians the followers of Jesus were referred to as the *People of the Way* or the *People of the Resurrection* or the *Easter People*. The apostles and the people of the infant Church were called that because of the way that they lived their lives. The experience of the Resurrection of the Lord changed their lives. It was an experience that transformed them. Contrast Peter, for example, as he cowardly denied even knowing Jesus during the Passion with Peter as he boldly proclaimed the risen Lord at Pentecost. He is transformed by the Easter experience and emboldened with the power of the Holy Spirit. The transformation of those early Christians, and in fact the world, is one of the anchor points of my faith.

Without the Resurrection the Cross would not have been a victory but a defeat. We have the vantage point of looking back at the Cross through the lens of the empty tomb. The victory has been won. The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus not only changed the apostles, but it changed the world forever. The question for each of us is, "Will we allow the power of the Paschal Mystery to change us?"

Sacred Scripture is full of images of flowing water as a powerful symbol of God's love pouring upon the world. I have used the image of Niagara Falls in past homilies. During the Triduum the symbol is ever present. It begins on Holy Thursday with the pouring of water on the feet of the disciples. Upon the Cross on Good Friday blood and water flowed from the pierced side of Jesus. On Holy Saturday the waters of baptism flow from the font of Christ's Church.

During the Last Supper Peter was refusing to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus said to him, "If I do not wash you, you will have no inheritance with Me." (Jn 13:8) In other words, unless you allow me to wash you, you will not share the gift of eternal life. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. However, because of the gift of free will, we must allow Him to take away our sins. We must allow Him to wash us clean. We must accept the gift of His love. Unless we allow Him to wash our feet we will have no inheritance with Him.

Nearly two thousand years have come and gone since that first Easter. It is the event that changed the world, changed the course of human history. The question is, "Will we allow it to change each one of us?" Like the Cross, Easter must become personal for each one of us. Like St. Peter and the apostles, we should be changed by the Easter experience and empowered by the Spirit of the Risen Lord. We are still the *Easter People*, the *People of the Resurrection*. Happy Easter and Alleluia!!!

Yours in the Risen Christ and Mother Mary,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Easter Sunday

Personal Witness

Several years ago, I was in Rome for a couple of weeks touring the great Catholic sites. I spent the first few days at St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museum. I first knelt at the Tomb of St. Peter for several hours feeling incredibly connected to Christ and to His Church. From there I branched out visiting the numerous churches in Rome.

One day I was visiting Santa Maria sopra Minerva church, and I discovered a lesser-known statue by the famous artist Michelangelo. It is entitled *The Risen Christ* and is located just to left of the main altar. I was instantly captivated by the statue.

I think all too often we see in art very effeminate renderings of Jesus in paintings and in statuary. This is not my image of Jesus. I have always pictured Jesus as a very strong and rugged man. As a carpenter working with his hands in his father's shop, he would have naturally developed a pronounced muscle tone. Certainly, the renderings taken from the Shroud of Turin capture the ruggedness of Jesus. In the movie *The Passion of the Christ* the actor Jim Caviezel captures my image of Jesus as a strong and powerful man.

With *The Risen Christ* Michelangelo captures a strikingly powerful image of Jesus. He is portrayed as an extremely muscular man. With his rippling biceps and powerful thighs, with His well-developed chest and well-defined abdominal muscles He looks like a powerful highly trained athlete. His body bears the nail marks in his hands and in his feet. He is holding the cross slightly behind him in his right hand. The cross is small in comparison; it could not have held the person who was now holding it. In His left-hand the Risen Lord is holding His shepherd's staff.

What captivates me the most is the face of Jesus. As Jesus was journeying to Jerusalem to take up His Cross, we are told that His face was set like flint. He was resolutely focused on the task for which He came into the world. Now the Risen Lord with staff in hand is discarding the Cross and His face is looking forward, set like flint on the new world and the mission that lies ahead. The Risen Lord is now the Good Shepherd who is seeking us out and leading us forward into the fullness of life, life eternal. A new power has been unleashed on the world. It is the power of the Resurrection.

One of the anchor points of my faith is the power of the Resurrection. It is a power that would change the world forever. The apostles are the first to be transformed by their experience of the Risen Lord. With the experience of the empty tomb, the Resurrection appearances of Jesus, the Ascension of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the infant Church spreads like a wildfire. This rapid transformation of the world witnesses to the power of the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit working anew.

Easter is more than a holiday that we celebrate or the great event that we commemorate: It is a way of life, a way of living. We now live our lives empowered by the Resurrection and guided by the Holy Spirit. Two thousand years have come and gone, and we are still the Easter People, the People of the Resurrection. People today need to see in us what was visible in the apostles, the face of the Risen Lord, a face set like flint on the mission at hand, the spreading of the Good News. He is Risen. Happy Easter!

