Palm Sunday
Mary Margaret Pachucki, OP
April 5, 2020
Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Matthew 26: 14-27:66

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week, a time of remembering the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus though sacred rituals, readings from Scripture and shared prayer. This year we will journey through Holy Week in a much different way because of the “social distancing” that is necessary to turn the tide of the spread of the coronavirus in our world. Instead of gathering together as a faith community in a church or chapel on these sacred days, we will spend Holy Week on our designated floors, in our rooms or in our homes. In these places, many of us will able to connect with each other through technology for these liturgical celebrations and prayer. However, we come together, we are and remain a community of faith joined by our shared belief in the Risen Christ.

With the start each year of Holy Week, we turn intently toward Jesus. We are not just remembering an historical event that happened over two thousand years ago. We are celebrating and taking part in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as it happens today to us and for us.

The blessing of this week is that it calls us to look carefully at Jesus. We watch, not just to admire, but also to learn, to penetrate the mind, the thinking, the attitudes and the values of Jesus so that we, in the very different circumstances of our own lives, may walk in his footsteps. In a way the real key to Holy Week is given in today’s Second Reading, which seems to be a hymn, incorporated by Paul in his letter to the Christians at Philippi. It expresses the “mind,” the thinking of Jesus, a “mind” which Paul urges us to have also if we want to identify fully with Jesus as disciples. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Elisabeth Johnson in her commentary on this passage writes, “Paul envisions the life of the community being formed by the mind of Christ – by a spirit of humility and loving service to one another rather than competition and grasping for power and control.” On this Sunday marking Jesus’ passion, we are called to reflect on what it means to bear this name above all other names. Does our life together reflect "the same mind that was in Christ Jesus"? Are we looking to the interests of others rather than our own interests? Are humility and servanthood evident among us?

Having the mind of Christ ought to shape not only the internal life of a congregation, but its relationship with its community and the world. By following Jesus in identifying with the lowly and giving ourselves away in humble service to a suffering world, we honor "the name that is above every name."

If we are to be Jesus’ disciples, we are invited us to walk in his way, to share his sufferings, to imitate his attitudes, to “empty” ourselves, to live in service of others – in short, to love others as he loves us. This is not at all a call to a life of pain and misery. Quite the contrary, it is an
invitation to a life of deep freedom, peace and happiness. If it were anything else, it would not be worth considering.

Let this week give us divine hope. No hardship, no burden, no cross not even the Coronavirus can conquer us if we remain steadfast in Christ Jesus, letting Him transform all we endure in life by His glorious embrace of His own Cross.
Holy Thursday  
Frances Nadolny, OP  
April 9, 2020  
Exodus 12:1-14  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26  
John 13:1-15  

Back in February when we selected which homily we were to prepare, I was so happy as this day is such a special one with rich meaning and beautiful readings. That is still the case, but the greater context is so much more daunting than I ever could have imagined back when the snow was on the ground.

The Passover narrative describes the tenth plague visited upon the Egyptians and from which the community of Israel was spared. In these days of pandemic, there are no doorposts to be marked. But the doorposts of our souls may indicate something from which we would like to be freed. What is the freedom you would like to request from the Divine?

Paul recounts the very familiar story of Jesus and the sharing of Eucharist while at table with his friends. In these days of pandemic, our sharing of Eucharist with one another is so limited. Each day that we are without the Eucharist we value that gift given to us tonight. But our tradition of setting aside a special place for the Eucharist to be reposed is not permitted this evening. Where in your heart will Jesus repose between now and Easter? What gift do you request from the Divine in order to have a suitable resting place for your God?

During the Passover supper, Jesus became a servant washing the feet of his followers. Think of our Co-workers serving us just as they have done day in and day out for many years. Why does their service seem so different to us now? Why are we so much more appreciative? Why do the simple acts of helping one another by way of a note, a phone call, a virtual hug, seem so huge to us? In these days of pandemic, everyone in every country is touched in some way by the virus, by the seeming inconvenience, by the magnitudes of its impact. Where is the Divine leading you tonight?

On this night of Passover, Eucharist, servanthood, may the Divine be ever-present to us.
And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

We have reached the barren hour in the Passion of Christ. The cross – a crucible of suffering and love – is laid bare. Like the three Marys, we stand at its foot, barely able to absorb the horror of its brutality – and seeming finality.

As we enter our fourth week of sheltering in place, our entire world has become a crucible of suffering and love. More than a million people around the globe have contracted the coronavirus, roughly half of those in the United States. The death toll has reached 100,000 worldwide, including many women and men who contracted the virus as they provided loving care to sick patients.

While the numbers are numbing, the anguish is intimate:

A beloved grandfather dying alone in a hospital. A nurse staying away from home to protect her children. An undocumented migrant fearful of seeking needed medical attention. A Latina with diabetes and her African-American friend who suffers from hypertension, among the many people of color disproportionately impacted by the virus – as the pandemic exploits the vulnerabilities wrought by epidemics of racism.

This barren hour will extend for days to come. Bodies are being piled in freezer trucks, too many to lay in a tomb.

Like the three Mary’s, we stand at the foot of the cross, barely able to absorb the horror of this global crucible of suffering and love.

Like the three Mary’s, we remain, accompanying in our hearts and prayer the crucified ones and all those who daily risk their lives, providing healthcare, food, sanitation and other essential services to us all.

And like the three Mary’s, may we rise in the fullness of time to anoint the bodies and tend to the new life that will emerge. A new life where we are able – perhaps as never before – to preach that ancient truth: We are all One body, held in Divine Love.

“We are caught...” Dr. Martin Luther King wrote years ago from a jail in Birmingham: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

In this epic crucible of suffering and loss, may we each enter into a new depth dimension, feeling ourselves cloaked in the single garment of the whole Earth community – and held in the saving embrace of Love incarnate.
Easter Vigil
Patricia Siemen, OP
April 11, 2020

Genesis 1:1-5
Dialogues of St. Catherine, Chapter 11
Jeremiah 29:11-15
Romans 6:3-4
Matthew 28:1-30

The Fawn by Mary Oliver

My dear Sisters, friends and loved ones, on behalf of the members of the Leadership Council gathered here tonight, I wish you a blessed Easter during this most unusual and transformative time!

The readings from our prayer service tonight remind us to “Awake; be not afraid. The One you seek is not here. Go and tell the other disciples, that Jesus goes before you into Galilee. It is there that you will find him.”

Despite Matthew’s directive, we cannot actually “go” to Galilee these days. Indeed, we cannot go anywhere. Instead, we remain in place as an Easter people. Our going to “Galilee” is one of being confined to our rooms, apartments, houses. We find Jesus in our closest neighbor; the persons bringing meals and mail to our rooms; the technology folks who help us connect via livestream with others. Our going into Galilee is our staying in place, distancing ourselves for the sake of protecting ourselves, and others, and not burdening an already overstretched health care system. Our witnessing to the good news is expressed through our prayer and experience of community; our connection to the wider world comes through the amazing gifts of internet and web streaming. This year we go into Galilee through technology rather than on foot or by car.

Matthew’s Gospel this Easter vigil tells us that Jesus is not here. He is not where we expected: he is no longer in the tomb, nor in our emptied chapels and churches. The Risen One goes before us disguised in many forms and faces. We find him in the Galilees where health care workers, who are severely stressed and endangered, are found. He is among those bringing comfort, care and supplies to those suffering from the Covid-19 virus. He is found among the scientific researchers and those who are coordinating medical and financial relief for those in dire need. He is found in the fields where farmworkers are picking tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuce so grocery stores can provide healthy food. He is found among the truck drivers bringing needed food and medical supplies to population centers around the world.

The Risen One is found in the Galilees of our homes, apartments, hospitals, and nursing homes where people are caring for one another. The Risen One is found among the artists, poets and musicians who find ways to soothe our hearts and feed our souls. And, the Risen One is found in the quiet simplicity of our hearts; hearts that long to know and cling to Holy Mystery, to Eternal Truth.
The One whom the two Marys seek at the tomb is not there. The stone in front of the tomb is pushed aside; the tomb is empty. As they leave dismayed and confused, Jesus appears to them. He tells them “Do not be afraid. Tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee where they will find me.”

It is in the many Galilees of today’s world, not hiding in a tomb, that we will meet the disgraced one; the one who overcomes death. The Risen One, through the friendship and accompaniment of others, rolls back the boulders that keep us hidden in the tombs of our lives. The stones that once weighed us down and blocked us from inner freedom are removed. The stones that blind us to the sea-change in consciousness needed in order for us to love each other and to heal Earth – these stones are being been rolled away. Covid-19 has helped us to see anew what is important. Becoming a beloved community, a global community united in one mind and heart, as Jesus prayed during his final supper with his friends, is what is important as we go towards the Galilees in our lives.

Today we move as an Easter people into the midst of a pandemic that is causing global suffering, death and grieving. We place our hope in the Risen One, in the deep sea of Eternal Truth. As we heard tonight, Catherine of Siena prays, “You, oh eternal Truth, are a deep Sea, into which the deeper I enter the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek; ...the Soul continually hungers after You. Clothe me with You, Oh Eternal Truth.”

As a beloved community we swim and live in the deep sea of God who embraces and sustains us. We head towards Galilee with hope and expectation, showing everyone along the way, by our acts of compassion and mercy, that the Spirit of God indeed lives among us. Indeed, the whole Earth is our Galilee; all of creation is the Body of Christ; this is where we find the Risen One.

Ilia Delio tells us, “Every act done in love gives glory to God: a pause of thanksgiving, a laugh, a gaze at the sun, or just raising a toast to your friends on your Zoom screen. The Good news? He is not here! Christ is everywhere and Love will make us whole.” Let us head towards Galilee.
Easter Sunday
Patricia Harvat, OP
April 12, 2020
Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-9

It was Easter 2023 – three years had passed since the devastating coronavirus ravaged this world leaving behind children with no parents, friends without friends, spouses and significant others, alone on this planet. Such was the case of Tanya, an aunt to Elizabeth, 7 years old, Charlie, 8 years old and Ruby, 10 years old. Their mother had been a nurse at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, NY, and worked 12-hour shifts with the coronavirus patients when she herself contracted the virus and died. She was a single mom and her sister Tanya had taken in the three children to raise them in the post coronavirus era. Though they were not infected they remained afflicted by the virus. This was their third Easter together and as usual Tanya gathered Elizabeth, Charlie and Ruby on the couch to tell them the Resurrection story. The children so liked hearing it as their mother would read the story from the Bible. But Tanya would make the narrative a real story reading it through the eyes of Mary of Magdala. And so Tanya began.....

It was some 20 years since Mary of Magdala went to the tomb to discover the stone was removed from where her Beloved was laid to rest after a brutal crucifixion. Each year as the spring flowers would begin to nudge their colorful crown heads from the darkened earth, Mary would gather the women in her village to tell them the story of how their God/Jesus was risen from the dead. “I can still see the rough yet sweet touch of a blood-stained sweaty face, leaving its imprint on my heart,” she says. Those distant memories of people, places and life lessons learned in the years I walked, laughed and cried with Jesus and the disciples.

As I arrived at the tomb early in the morning, I said to myself, “Maybe death is not the end. Maybe love goes on and on. Maybe that’s what Jesus meant when he said he would rise on the third day. However, it was just a fleeting thought.” I arrived at the tomb weeping, feeling something deep inside of me was shattered. Longing to hear his voice and experience what once was in my life.

To experience his love again. But the emptiness inside of me matched the emptiness of the tomb. The huge stone was rolled away. Someone took my Beloved’s body. I travelled the hidden and secret passageways of my heart, climbed the rocks and cliffs of my memory. I stood before the dark and empty cave of my own life. That’s when I realized that in looking for my Beloved, my Beloved found me.... Found me in the place I was least likely to look – within myself.

It was the realization of being human, of being alive and being loved. The tomb that once smelled of death and destruction now was a witness to the surprising restoration life, of sweetness, of hope. This was the way the women of the village remembered to remember.

And is this not what we do now? Just like Tanya and the children, who needed to remember what it was like when their mother read them the Easter story.
We today gather to tell the story to one another.

- It doesn't take away the pain or vulnerability we experience in this life.
- It doesn't take away the loss of a young mother.
- But it does let us say I love you while still walking through the vale of tears and valley of death.

Because we believe. We believe in a God who tells us, “We need to love bigger and care bigger,” as the one of the caretakers said as she took a break between her shifts as the hospital.

We believe in a God who, as Martin Sheen, the actor, once said, “God dwells where we would least likely look, within the depths of our own being, our own shallowness, our own darkness, our own humanity.”

The shadows of terror in this life will break forth into beauty. The awful beauty of so many stories...stories like that of Laura whose mother died on one floor of the hospital and her father died on the floor above her mother within hours of each other. “I want to remember their love story,” she said.

Today, we need to remember our love story with our resurrected God and with one another. Because we do believe and we place all our hope each day that the burial cloths are laid aside knowing that love does go on and on.