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An Easter Meditation

He Died That We Might Live

By
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He did not want to die! Jesus of Nazareth did not want to die, especially not then, when He was so young. Though He was truly obedient unto death, He did not live His life looking forward to His execution. The trauma in Gethsemane was real. The tears, the sweat, the blood, the loud cries, the anguish of soul were all very real. The plea "If it be possible, let this cup pass by me" was the plea of a man who wished there were some other way. And why shouldn't He? His life was not a masquerade. He was human, a man like us in all things but sin. It takes nothing away from His wondrous Divinity as the Son united with the Father and Holy Spirit in the unapproachable light and the inescapable darkness of the Trinity to acknowledge that, humanly speaking, Jesus did not want to die. He was a young man, full of energy and ideas. In His thirties, not quite at the peak of His potential, growing more and more popular by the day, His message seemed to be just beginning to catch on. He had everything to live for!

Like anyone else, He might have been happy to die in His own house, in His own bed surrounded by His family and friends. But for reasons forever inscrutable to us, Providence used the painful death of the Suffering Servant as the event to usher in the new age of the Reign of God and to bring salvation to the world.

And suffer He did. "At the end the light in His eyes seemed half faded away, His teeth were smeared with blood, His face cruelly distorted, His mouth open and His saliva mingled with blood. His body was hallow and dried out as if he no longer had any entrails. Since most of His blood had been spilled, His flesh was pale. His members were convulsively stretched out, hair and beard encrusted with blood. His hands spasmodically gripped the nails and then released their grip. Arms and legs lost their tension and His body hung heavily on the cross." (From the writings of St. Bridget of Sweden)

You may ask. Even if He suffered physically, surely He did not suffer psychologically or spiritually? After all He knew how it was going to turn out. He knew that He would show his tormentors and three days later He would triumph. His "Eli, Eli lama Sabattani," was not real anguish. It was only a quotation of the first lines of a triumphant psalm. Perhaps you think He said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" quite matter-of-factly. Could He not have said "My God! My God! Why? Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" As one sharing uniquely and sinlessly in our humanity, could it not be that like Abraham and Moses, He obeyed the Father's will in absolute trust with no humanly certain knowledge of how His life and death would be vindicated? In His human consciousness could He not have suffered the pain of a certain kind of uncertainty?

What was He thinking on the cross? We will never know. As libraries full of novels attest, it is the stuff of fiction. But imagination has a valid place in Christian meditation.

Perhaps His thoughts turned to some of the players in the fierce drama. Did He think of Pontius Pilate, the unscrupulous representative of the power of Emperor Tiberius? Pilate knew that the Just Man had committed no crime worthy of death. But he had to "keep order" if he was to remain in favor in Rome. Would Pilate ever forget the final plaintive look of innocence in His blood filled eyes when he said, "Ecce Homo," "Behold the Man!" Pilate could not have imagined that hundreds of years later, millions of people would be mentioning his name and giving him the blame. "He suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Perhaps he took some comfort when His weary eyes met those of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. These and many other upright leaders of the Jewish community knew that in Him, God was present in Israel in a unique way. He wanted to wipe the grief from their faces. But he could not.



Could it have occurred to Him that one day His followers and the Jewish people would be in bloody conflict, forgetting that He Himself was Jewish? Could He have thought that some Catholics would see no conflict between their Christian faith and anti-Semitism? Could He have imagined that Christian People would one day buy and sell other human beings as slaves?

Perhaps He was distracted from His thought and overheard some of the women at the foot of the cross: "Do you remember that woman, who everybody knew was a common prostitute. What was her name? Mary? Mary Magdalene? Anyway, He knew she was a sinner. Yet He did not condemn her. He forgave her sins. They say she completely changed and became one of His followers." "What about that fellow who was blind from birth? He swears that this man gave him his sight. I have never met him but they say he is over there near the cross."

"Do you remember when that bad case of leprosy broke out and whole families were being wiped out? One day ten lepers were made clean. And the report is that it was because of Him." "All of you know that I just moved here from Naim. I did not actually see it myself, but the story is still circulating there that He gave life back to the only son of that widow woman." "They say the same thing about Lazarus and he had been dead for four days."

"Wasn't it last year around this time that we stopped to hear Him speak?" "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." "He was really quite eloquent and profound." But I said then it was unrealistic. I said His ideas about loving your enemies would never work in this world. And look where it has gotten Him. It is a real shame. He could have been a great Rabbi and made Mary proud of Him."

Jesus' eyes are filled with tears, not from the pain of the cross. They are tears of love for His dear people everywhere. Then one of those who had plotted His downfall says "Enough of this. If He saved all those others like they say, then let Him come down from the cross and save Himself. Then, we will believe in Him." "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He looks in vain for the Apostles. What went wrong with Judas? I always liked him. He was good to me. I trusted him

with the little money we had. I shared his dreams of a better world. What went wrong with Judas? Even now we are together. For his last hour and my last hour have ended.

I thought at least Peter and James would be here. Especially Peter. After all that we have been through together. Yet he told the guard last night, as the cock crowed, that he did not even know me. Father, give Peter and his successors the strength they shall need to face all of the challenges of the future.

But dear John is here! As I knew he would be. He really understands me and my mission. I know that I can count on him. He is like my own brother. Even now as I look at him and he looks at me we communicate without words.

And Mary, Mother Dear, I wish you could have been spared this sight. But you knew, you knew from Simeon in the Temple that this day would come. Lean on John since our beloved Joseph is not with us. Mother Mary, I really do not know how to ease your pain, but I know you understand. You know what it means to say they will be done. Let it be.

He can scarcely breathe. The pain of pulling His body up to get air into His lungs is excruciating. He knows it won't last much longer.

In the nether world, His delirious soul contemplates history yet to come. Will my life, my teaching, my powerful signs, and my death really matter? Will they matter in 2002 in Southwest Louisiana? Has my life and death been worthwhile for anyone? Is there anyone interested in the Good News that I proclaimed with my whole heart? Has the religion of my followers become a dull habit? Is there one person hearing my story on Easter Sunday in a Church in Lake Charles, Moss Bluff, or Jennings who this day will become a true Christian, on fire with the gospel? Do husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, parents and single people, the young, the sick and the elderly know or care who I am? Is Easter Sunday all about spring clothes, chocolate rabbits, and colored eggs? Am I a living person in their world? Do not movie stars, popular singers and Olympic athletes mean more to them than I do? I don't want to die if I am dying in vain. Don't the people in the churches know that it's not the fragrant lilies but their faith-filled lives that show forth the power of my Resurrection?

Struggling, He breathes his last breath. A terrible darkness covers the land. In the distance He sees a blazing light and hears the distant chorus of history.

They say they can't believe it.

It's a sacrilegious shame.

Now who would want to hurt such a hero of the game?

But you know I predicted it.

I knew He had to fall.

How did it happen?

I hope His suffering was small.

Tell me every detail.

I've got to know it all.

And do you have a picture of the pain?

We adore Thee O Christ,

and we praise Thee.

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain

And has redeemed us to God by His blood.

Worthy is He to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength,

honor and blessings!

For the Lord God omnipotent reigns.

The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. And He shall reign for ever and ever.

King of kings, Lord of lords,

For ever and ever. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia!

EASTER

Break the box and shed the nard;
Stop not now to count the cost;
Hither bring pearl, opal, sard;
Reck not what the poor have lost;
Upon Christ throw all away:
Know ye, this is Easter Day

Build His church and deck His shrine,
Empty though it be on earth;
Ye have kept your choicest wine --
Let it flow for heavenly mirth,
Pluck the harp and breathe the horn:
Know ye not 'tis Easter morn?

Gather gladness from the skies;
Take a lesson from the ground;
Flowers do ope their heavenward eyes
And a Spring-time joy have found;
Earth throws Winter's robes away,
Decks herself for Easter Day

Beauty now for ashes wear,
Perfumes for the garb of woe.
Chaplets for dishevelled hair,
Dances for sad footsteps slow;
Open wide your hearts that they
Let in joy this Easter Day.

Seek God's house in happy throng;
Crowded let His table be;
Mingle praises, prayer and song,
Singing to the Trinity.
Henceforth let your souls always
Make each morn an Easter Day.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

Third Edition of Roman Missal Introduced

VATICAN CITY - The third edition of the Roman Missal in Latin is not simply the reprinting of an enlarged edition, but an "editio typica," an official, updated edition for the eucharistic celebration. The missal was presented to the media last Friday, March 22, to the media here.

The result of 10 years of work by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, it serves as a basis for translation into various languages, a task entrusted to bishops' conferences with the approval of the Holy See.

When the missal was presented, Father Ciro Benedettini, vice director of the Vatican Press Office, called the work a decisive volume for the Church because the "liturgy and the Eucharist [are] the apex of the relation between believers and God." The most important novelties of the new edition include the introduction of several saints in the universal calendar, as well as rituals for votive Masses in honor of the Virgin Mary, said officials of the Congregation for Divine Worship noted when they presented the missal.

In addition, the appendixes include Eucharistic Prayers approved for reconciliation Masses, for Masses offered for a variety of needs, as well as for children's Masses.

Especially significant is the "Institutio Generalis," the theological and normative introduction, which provides for the extension "of the possibilities to distribute Holy Communion under both species, according to the pastoral judgment of the diocesan bishop," according to the Vatican congregation.

Cardinal Arturo Medina Estavez, prefect of the congregation, explained that the new normative for Commu-

nion, which is "more simplified, takes into consideration the rather wide faculties granted after the second 'editio typica' of the Missal, the historical precedents, and the generalized use of Eastern rites."

The cardinal explained that the "new normative is a notable extension of what had been established to date, namely, that it is the competence of the diocesan bishop to issue norms for his diocese on the distribution of Communion under both species."

"This is a primary competence of the bishop, as established by law; therefore, it is not subject to the previous authorization of the conference of bishops," the cardinal continued. He cited Canon 381, Paragraph 1.

"In addition," he said, "the diocesan bishop may confer the faculty to each priest, in his capacity as pastor of a particular community, to judge the opportunity to distribute Communion under both species, with the exception of specific cases where it is recommended."

Regarding the general "Calendarium Romanum," three obligatory memorials have been added for saints Maximilian Maria Kolbe (Aug. 14); Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang and their companion martyrs of Korea (Sept. 20); and Andrew Dung-Lac and his companion martyrs of Vietnam (Nov. 24).

In addition, the missal includes 11 new celebrations: the Most Holy Name of Jesus on Jan. 3; St. Giuseppina Bakhita (former Sudanese slave), on Feb. 8; the Virgin of Fatima, on May 13; St. Christopher of Magallanes (Mexican martyr), on May 21; St. Rita of Cassia, on May 22, and St. Augustine Zhao Rong and companions (Chinese martyrs), on July 9. Also, St. Apollinar (bishop and martyr in the year 87), on July 20; St.

Sharbel Makhluif (Lebanese priest), on July 24; St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), on Aug. 9; Most

Holy Name of Mary, on Sept. 12; and St. Catherine of Alexandria (Egypt, third century), on Nov. 25.

World Day of Prayer for Vocations slated April 7 in Cathedral

LAKE CHARLES -- The celebration of World Day of Prayer for Vocations will be held during the 11 a.m. Mass on Sunday, April 7 in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton will be the celebrant at homilist.

Representatives of Parish Vocation Committees, Youth and Catholic Schools will be in attendance, keeping in mind that "we are all vocations directors."

Avoid mediocrity, conformism, Pope John Paul II tells students

VATICAN — At a meeting with university students last Monday, March 25, Pope John Paul II said that young Christians are often called to swim against the current in today's society.

The Holy Father met in the Paul VI auditorium with a group of about 4,000 students, who had gathered from around the world for the annual "UNIV" conference. The conference is organized during Holy Week by Opus Dei.

The Pope urged the young participants to resist "the temptation to mediocrity and

Priests, Religious and Deacons who will be celebrating anniversaries of 10 years, 25 years, 40 years, 50 years and 60 years and above will be recognized. If an priest, deacon or religious is celebrating such a milestone and has not yet contacted the Vocations office, they should call immediately to 439-7426, Ext. 17.

A reception will follow in the Cathedral parish office building, across the street from the Cathedral.

conformism." He said that they should embrace "a hard road, which often contrasts with the mentality of your contemporaries," and "go against the grain regarding the behavior and ways that dominate today."

Only by adopting that attitude, the Pope continued, can Christians perform their duty to serve the world's people, "to heal the wounds and suffering that so many people who are poor and marginalized still feel in our technologically advanced society."

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