

# PALM SUNDAY

&

# HOLY WEEK

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- Sun.      **PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION**  
April 14 **TRIUMPH AND THE CROSS**  
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- Mon.      **Monday of Holy Week**  
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A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

# **TRIUMPH AND THE CROSS**

**A reflection by Fr. Carroll StuhlmueLLer**

We have been striving to do our very best in surrendering ourselves to God all during Lent. Perhaps you are feeling exhausted. That is another call to self-surrender and to absorbing the “divine ideals” the Lord Jesus shows us. We are in the cycle of life-death-life at the heart of the Gospel and Jesus’ existence.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday, it seems that Jesus has arrived at the fulfillment of his mission. He is triumphantly acclaimed as Messiah by an entire crowd of disciples. They begin to rejoice as he enters Jerusalem and they praise God for the coming of God’s Messiah! It seems to them that peace and glory have come together and that even the angelic choirs are caught up in rejoicing.

Recall Jesus’ identification with the Suffering Servant spoken of by Isaiah. He too completed a long period of preparation in which he listened most intensely to God so he would know what to say to others. He possessed a heart sensitive not only to God but to others and was able to speak in ways that gave new hope to the oppressed and the neglected. Yet he helps others only by listening, morning after morning, to God’s will as revealed to him in prayer, and only then to others’ needs.

When the Suffering Servant, and Jesus, were fully prepared God asked them to accept suffering, rejection and martyrdom. What was best was being “handed over” freely, and they were letting themselves be consecrated—not so much by their accomplishments but by the surrender of their deepest selves. Only by the collapse of their accomplishments and the silencing of their words would the world be impressed by the special depths and strengths and purity of their consecration to God. Jesus has already undergone a process of giving up everything. He was God but “*emptied himself and took the form of a slave*”. Now he was asked to accept death, “*even death on a cross*”.

Even facing death Jesus retains a peaceful attitude, quietly and sensitively responding to each new sorrow. Even during the solemn procession into Jerusalem “*coming within sight of the city...he wept over it and said, “If only you had known the path to peace this day!”*” Throughout the passion Jesus is absorbed in prayer to the Heavenly Father, even as he is attentive to the least needs of those around him. Think of how he looked at Peter, who had denied knowing him three times. Peter went out and wept bitterly! What strong, tender and forgiving love must have been communicated to Peter by Jesus’ look!

We learn from Jesus that our greatest triumph lies in who we are for God and others and not in what we do. If we are for-God then the cross is an opportunity to be even more ourselves! We have to be emptied of self to be filled with God! We must arrive at total absorption in God before we can confess with all our being that God is the way and the goal of life. It is this sensitivity to God that makes us sensitive to all God’s people. Our triumph will be complete in and through God. In us Jesus will be glorified as Lord.

# **THE INWARD LABOR OF PRAYER**

**A reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner**

**There are moments when our prayer seems exalted, fervent and wonderful. But when such prayer is over—as always happens—we have to return to the slow, painful work on our inner self by which God changes and transforms us, and our often somber life of ordinariness, into a striving that never gives up. We are striving for the image of life and self we glimpsed in lofty moments of charismatic prayer. But we know that ideal can only be realized through prayer in the “everyday”—as we wrestle with gray work-a-day mornings and evening exhaustions. The fire of the Spirit that descended on us in the great moments has to divide into little flames that light up everyday hours so we can pray in whatever way that may be possible for us.**

**Everyday prayer is the prerequisite for hours of great grace. The Lord didn't create the exalted to replace the everyday. He also wills the petty and the insignificant that so fills our lives! We are God's servants in the fields, the workplaces, at the table, in the meeting room, behind a desk and even in bed. We are a little tattered and the worse for wear, lofty thoughts are difficult, but we are capable of a song coming from the heart; that is the prayer of the everyday. It is loyalty and reliability and selfless, unrewarded service. It is the dedication that makes gray and trivial moments great! It is all about the honor of God and not about you!**

**In our prayer-poor times we are a poor and loyal heart that honestly, in spite of all weaknesses and discontent, seeks to dig a small shaft through which a ray of eternal light can shine on our heart buried in the everyday. From agitated haste into serenity, from narrowness into the breadth of faith, from yourself to God—that is what such prayer is all about. It is a grace, but also a matter of good will, an art that has to be practiced come what may. One can learn to make a prayer out of reading sacred Scripture. One can learn during Evening Prayer to give the day's experience a direction toward God. Thus, one can learn to hallow the seemingly dead moments in which one can't do anything else. One can learn to be reminded of God's presence through the vexations as well as the little joys of the day.**

**Our soul in the everyday seems to be a huge barn in which everything from everywhere is unloaded haphazardly day after day—even until the hour we call our death. Then all the junk is thrown out of that barn. And then it will become a song of praise to God! It happens only through prayer, which itself one thing that is necessary. The everyday can't be fled from but has to be transformed. That is the task of steadfastness in prayer. It will happen through selflessness and prayer. It is a human but divine pedagogy. It fills our heart with a still, chaste love. What hinders us from loving God? Only ourselves.**

**In the everydayishness of life we can slowly die to self without commotion or notice. Until gradually, one notices that one didn't need what one had taken to be indispensable. There is only one thing needed—God. And God is with us always. Prayer reveals this truth to us as nothing else can.**

# **THE PERSONAL MEANING OF THE CROSS**

**A reflection by Carlo Cardinal Martini**

To contemplate the cross is to experience a message. God speaks, explains, admonishes. God shows us what burns in our lives, the naked facts of inflicted evil, pain, terror, and the tragedy that often comes. This is an inner dimension of Christ's passion. Jesus offers himself with full and free obedience to suffering and death and we are called to do the same. Jesus offers himself in prayer first. Then he steps forward to accept what all of us must—pain and death. He does it trusting in God. Jesus does this as a way of taking everyone's sins upon himself and transforming them into trusting, prayerful self-gifts. It is impossible for us to learn from Jesus and to follow him if we don't let life have a spiritual direction. The cross is an obstacle to all who don't have the courage to be detached from self and put themselves into God's hands.

The cross asks us many things. First it asks us to affirm that there do exist paths from the cross to the resolution of humankind's problems. Pain, suffering and death fill human history, and each person's life. Jesus didn't invent the cross; like each of us he found it on his life's journey. The extraordinary thing he did was plant a seed of love into everyone's bearing of a cross. That's what turns bearing the cross into a way that leads to life. This means a path for our transformation. Our cross is that of Jesus!

It embraces us and entrusts us with a personal duty. Think of all the broken families, all the illness, all the hardened hearts, all the resentment and brooding. How many cross-bearers fill our streets and workplaces? Too many crosses are born with quiet desperation. Jesus asks us to find a way to plant a seed of love in each of these cross-bearings. We start with our own.

Why did Jesus die? He died because he didn't stop loving others even when they prepared him for the cross and death. He identifies himself with Isaiah's Suffering Servant and so tells us he suffers for everybody and prays for everybody. Jesus wants life and happiness but he encounters evil, suffering and death. He eliminates evil not by ignoring or sidestepping it but by embracing it and inwardly transforming it by the power of divine love. He reveals how far we must go in love and obedience. His cross becomes a powerful sign of love for all, no matter the evil they do.

We are contemplating and speaking of the cross of Christ! It isn't just any cross. Our task is to transform mankind's crosses, perhaps one by one, into the cross of Christ! His cross is bright with hope and love. That hope is fulfilled in the Resurrection. That hope bears the name of love. It prepares the way for the victory of life in you and in me. No one is abandoned, though many feel as if they were. Christ felt that too, and expressed it in a prayer—to the one who seemed to have abandoned him. Is that trust? Is that love? You are given the grace of trusting and loving with Jesus. You are given a seed of love to plant.

# THE MYSTERY OF FORGIVING LOVE

A reflection from The Mirror of Love by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

We can't find a greater inspiration to love, even our enemies, and to love all as brothers and sisters, than by looking to Christ. If our love is to be full and perfect it must become Christ's love. This begins when we imitate Christ's wonderful patience, his sticking to love, even for those who crucified him.

Christ, Scripture tells us, is the "*fairest of the children of men*". This is the one who allowed his face to be spit on, allowed the eyes that see the universe to be blindfolded by the wicked, bared his back to be scourged, submitted his head to the sharp thorns and the lance, the gall, and the vinegar—but remained always gentle, kind and serene.

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb before the shearers he was silent and didn't open his mouth."* Have you listened carefully to his wonderful prayer, so full of affection, love, and unperturbable calm? *"Father, forgive them"*. Can you listen to this and refuse to embrace your enemies, as he did, with love?

*"Father, forgive them!"* What prayer could be more filled with gentleness and love? Yet Christ added something more. It was not enough to pray for all, even his enemies. He added an excuse to his prayer for them. *"They don't know what they are doing!"* Indeed, they seem great sinners. They are nailing him to the cross but he forgives and makes an excuse: *"If they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory!"*

Therefore, he prayerfully asks God: *"Father, forgive them!"* They think Christ is a lawbreaker, and imposter claiming to be God and seducing ordinary folks. I have hidden the face of Godhead from them and so they don't recognize my glory, he says. Therefore, *"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"*.

If we want to experience fully the joy of loving our brothers and sisters, we have to embrace with real love even our enemies. We must prevent the fire of divine love from being put out or even cooled by the injuries we have received. Let's keep the eyes of our soul always fixed on the serene patience of our Beloved Lord and Savior. In contemplating him, in contemplating his cross, in contemplating his love, we see the gifts God would give us. If we open ourselves to receive Christ, we receive also the love of the Father and the presence of the Spirit. In this love, we can forgive all who harm us, and so we become able to love them with our Lord.

# **BAPTISM, THE WASHING OF FEET & THE EUCHARIST**

## **A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard**

These are days filled with holiness and grace by which even the wicked are provoked to repentance; even hearts of stone are broken open and people who seemed dead are raised to new life. These are days in which we think of great sacraments, of the washing away of sin, of the healing of the disfigurements sin causes, and of the marvelous food that is Christ's body and blood given to us.

A sacrament is something like a secret that has to be broken open if we are enter into its mystery and be nourished thereby. A mother doesn't give her child a nut but breaks the shell and gives what is hidden within it. As the Lord came to his passion, he wanted to clothe his disciples with grace communicated by visible signs. This time of year reminds us that sin is cleansed away by baptism. Its grace enters the mind and heart; it begins to dissolve deep seated corruption.

Will you ask: "If what we contracted from our first parents is erased by baptism why do our evil desires persist as fuel and incentive for sin?" Often, I have reminded you that we have fallen off a heap of stones and ended up in the mire, befouled and wounded and badly shaken. We can wash quickly enough, but it takes a while for a complete healing. The wounds aren't bleeding but a scab has formed and itches; we mustn't tear it open again by scratching.

Baptism causes us to refuse consent to temptation, and so to sin, and has taught us that sensuality isn't a path to happiness. Yet we feel passions like anger, envy and lust and want them healed.

To show us the way to health we have the sacrament of the washing of feet. How do we know it will help? Remember what Our Lord said to Peter. "*What I am doing you do not understand now, but later you will*". He went on: "*I have given you an example, that you too may do the same as I do.*" He warns us, "*If I don't wash you, you will have no part with me*".

Something needful for salvation is hidden in this washing. Look at your feet as the symbols for the dispositions of your soul. They are always in the dust and are never entirely clean while we live. How do dispositions get cleansed and healed? This is accomplished by charity, by mutual love.

We must help each other. To humble us the Lord allows concupiscence to live in us and we cleanse it not by indulging it and so leading ourselves and others into sin. Instead we lead each other to the virtue that is love and care and helpfulness. These are graces which our mother the church opens for us so we find the nourishment and delight which are hidden within. What we do willingly we come to delight in and as our delight in loving kindness increase so our attraction to sin decreases. At the altar we receive one food and one drink, reminding us that what we need for nourishment is only the one love shown us by Christ. We need claim nothing as our own and private to ourselves because we have together all we truly need, the Lord's love and care. We show this to each other by the way we care for and treasure one another in the freedom given us by knowing we needn't worry about the morrow or about what we will eat or wear. We have only to look for deeds of love and for being more and more for one another what the Lord is for us all. This is the grace of these days.

# **MEDITATING ON CHRIST'S CROSS**

**A chapter talk by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

One who dies on the cross is not on the earth but lifted above it. More, the members of the body are stretched out. The crucified is extended in four directions and so seems to enfold the four parts of the world and to unite heaven and earth at the same time. Christ chose this death and filled it with a divine meaning. That he died with arms outstretched is a sign of his great loving-kindness.

Reflect on what we are taught. First, we are taught to be brave enough to die for others and for ourselves. Second, we should think of its four dimensions. Its width signifies charity that embraces all. It is wide because every other precept is woven into it so that it perfects all things. Third, height signifies our hope. We hope to reign with Christ. We may know what we are now but we are ignorant of what we shall be. Fourth, the length of the cross signifies our perseverance. This reminds us of our dying with Christ. Let all that belongs to the "old person" be crucified with Christ however long that takes. We receive like nails the precepts of God so we cannot move toward sin. As a crucified person can't move hands, feet or any bodily member so one who wishes to die with Christ restrains all bodily members from evil acts.

The place the Lord was crucified was outside the city. This means he accept the reproaches and scorn of others. We cannot both love the glory of the world and bear the reproach that Christ did. There is a place outside earthly cities where we can go to be crucified with Christ. One leaves honors, riches, worldly delights, softness, vanity, sensuality and like things. We accept bitterness, reproaches, and tribulations and seek only the goods that are eternal. The world held the Lord in contempt so why should we wish worldly honors if we are following him?

Therefore, whoever wishes to die with Christ, rise up with Christ, ascend to heaven with Christ, let him cut away everything superfluous and made a grateful offering of it to the Lord. Have nothing in the world except what is absolutely necessary. This mount that is Calvary will be within you. It is great perfection to seek nothing in this world except what is absolutely necessary. As St. Paul says, "*Having food and clothing, we are content*".

It follows that those who act in these ways are plainly the children of God. They have become, as it were, bald. Children mocked Elijah by calling him "bald", because of the tonsure that went with his prophetic office. When we let go of all that is not God's we begin to do the same sort of thing. In celebrating this solemn feast what do we seek except to make progress in walking the way to God? That is how we imitate Christ's dying and prepare ourselves to join him in being crowned with glory. Let us help one another cling to Christ alone and by leaving all things for God's sake find all things in God. Let us help one another love Christ and God above all things and so let their love live within us and work for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

# **LET CHRIST'S RESURRECTION SHAPE YOUR LIFE**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard**

St. Paul tells us that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith. As long as faith lives in us Christ lives in us. Our works testify that our faith is alive. We discern the aliveness of faith from good works. The life of the body is the soul and the life of faith is love. Faith works through love. Now it is the Spirit that gives life and faith and love. St. Paul teaches us once more, *"If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live"*. If faith is dead in the soul, for that person Christ is still in the tomb.

What restores a person to life if faith has died within? One needs to imitate the holy women who bought spices to anoint Jesus' body. They didn't think they were going to bring him to life again but were only warding off the stink of death. When faith seems to have died let spices be sought. Above all I mean the spice which is affectionate compassion, zeal for uprightness, and discretion. This gives birth to good deeds and where they are there is life and a living faith.

Remember first what Jesus said to the women who wept for him as he bore his cross: *"Do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children."* Notice that they are to begin by weeping for themselves; if you can't be compassionate to yourself how will you be compassionate to others? If you can't reprove yourself in a spirit of gentleness you can't reprove others effectively? Example is more effective and impressive than words.

But what if one to whom we show compassion won't respond? We must show compassion to rightness. That is zeal for rightness. We must not rest for seeking ways to persuade another to turn to the Lord. We must not quench the smoldering wick but we must never cease to seek ways to love others compassionately but effectively. When one has compassion and a zeal for rightness then one needs discretion. We must appropriately match circumstances with ways of being zealously compassionate. Discretion does it.

Where will we obtain such spices? They don't grow up in us spontaneously. We need to buy them. What money have we? We have that of self-will. That is what we must let go of in order to obtain the spices that allow us to love each other truly and effectively. By losing it we lose nothing important and gain very great things. We can't be compassionate to ourselves if we're filled with self-will. We need a common will and that is called love. If you only love yourself how would you love rightness and hate iniquity? Love is kind. The spirit of discretion discloses this. Perhaps you have to buy this with confession of your own sins.

What you need is efficacious persuasion. This comes from a holy life and that from humble confession. Such a person has the power of the angel who rolled away the stone from the Lord's tomb. Those whose faith has died don't need to enter the tomb but to leave it. Seek holiness from the Lord that you may acquire the spices needed for holiness, and pray for the grace to use them in a way that leads others into new life. That is the gift of Resurrection.