

# **PALM SUNDAY & HOLY WEEK**

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Sun.      **PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD**  
April 5    **HOW DO WE RECEIVE JESUS DAILY?**  
            A reflection from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Mon.      **Monday of Holy Week**  
6            **THE HUMILITY OF GOD: John Macquarrie**

Tues.     **Tuesday of Holy Week**  
7            **CONFORM YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST'S**  
            A reflection from Being Christian by Pope Benedict XVI

Wed.      **Wednesday of Holy Week**  
8            **DO NOT FEAR THE CROSS: St. Oscar Romero**

## **THE SACRED PASCHAL TRIDUUM**

Thurs.    **Holy Thursday of the Lord's Supper**  
9            **CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST,**  
            **CHRIST IN THE POOR**  
            Bishop Dom Helder Camara

Fri.        **Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord**  
10          **HOW SACRIFICE HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED**  
            A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

Sat.        **Holy Saturday**  
11          **ACCEPTING POVERTY OF SPIRIT**  
            From Poverty of Spirit by Fr. Johannes Baptist Metz

*Sunday*

## **HOW DO WE RECEIVE JESUS DAILY?**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny**

When Jesus entered Jerusalem like a triumphant conqueror and many were astonished at the majesty of his bearing. But when, only a short time after this, he entered his passion his appearance was ignoble and he was an object of derision. If today's procession is considered together with the Lord's passion, we see Jesus as sublime and glorious and simultaneously as lowly and suffering. The procession makes us think of the honor a king receives, whereas the passion reminds us of the punishments inflicted on criminals.

Apply this to your own ways of receiving Jesus. At one time we want to follow and be like him; but at another we flee from what we see and hope that it will never befall us. We do the first when we practice virtue and the second when we prefer to sin rather than to follow our Savior.

In the procession Jesus is surrounded by glory and honor, but in his passion, we see neither dignity nor beauty. In the first Jesus is everyone's joy, the people's glory, but in the second he is treated as the butt of taunts and seen as a laughing stock. In our procession we meet Jesus with palm branches but in his passion we as sinners join in slapping him in the face and hitting him in the head with a stick. In the one we extol him with praises but in the other we heap insults on his teaching and his way of behaving. In the first people competed to lay their cloths in his path but then people stripped him for whipping and crucifixion. At one time we welcomed him as our just king and savior and then we threw him out of our lives and homes though a criminal and an imposter.

What makes it so difficult to follow our genuine leader? Perhaps it is a love for prosperity and a fear of hard or bad times. Can't we keep our eyes upon him as we see him in the procession and so honor him and seek to imitate and be close to him? Do we have to flee from the sight of his ignominy and suffering for fear we might share in it? He was unshakably steadfast in all changes and trials and that is what we need to pray to be.

Lord Jesus, you are the joy and salvation of the entire world. Whether we see you sitting on an ass, as the sign that you come in peace and bring good times, or see you hanging on the cross for our sins because we have connived at injustice and oppression in its many forms, let us now seek to be with you and at least begin to imitate you. Help us to pray, and long for, your reign on earth as on high and help us be changed so that we always praise you and seek to belong to you whatever that may cost. To you be glory and praise forever!

*Monday*

## **THE HUMILITY OF GOD: John Macquarrie**

The passion of Jesus Christ is not only a great human drama. Christians have seen in it the decisive moment when God himself has drawn near and made himself known. When we think of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ, we are not primarily recalling the fate of an individual, however, inspiring that may be. We are meditating on the mystery of God, for here we believe, the ultimate reality is revealed at its deepest level. And what we learn about that reality is both shattering and strengthening.

It is shattering because it contradicts all our conventional ideas of God. The lonely figure of Jesus Christ, following the way of the cross, seems not so much the revelation of God as rather the contradiction of everything that has been commonly believed about God. Almighty God is our usual way of addressing him, and even Christians have tended to think of God as a celestial monarch, disposing of the world according to his sovereign will, untouched and untroubled by the storms which rage below. This is surely a terrible misunderstanding. The point is that we are being invited to see God in the Son in this despised, rejected, suffering figure, not to look away from him to some distant sapphire

throne, as if the reality were rather than here, and if what we see on Calvary is a bad dream obscuring reality. To think in that way would be to miss the whole meaning of incarnation and passion, which is that God comes among us in weakness and humility to stand with us in the midst of creation.

Where we go wrong is that we bring along some ready-made idea of God, wherever we may have learned it, and then try to make Jesus Christ fit into that idea of God. If we take the idea of the revelation of God in Christ seriously, then we must be willing to have our understanding of God corrected and even revolutionized by what we learn in Jesus Christ. In other words, we cannot fit Christ into some previously established theistic understanding of the world. We have to move in the opposite direction, and that means that it is through Christ that we have to understand God and his relation to the world. Thus, we have to begin with the Cross, with what happened here on earth and in the course of human history, not with the exalted deity on the sapphire throne of pious imagining.

The Crucified Christ is the human face of God.

*Tuesday*

## **CONFORM YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST'S**

**A reflection from Being Christian by Pope Benedict XVI**

The promise of the Passover Feast is fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. One goes out, as in an exodus, leaving behind possessions and the life one has been accustomed to lead. This began with Abraham and is the foundational law of all Sacred History. We move from a purely selfish existence to one of following Christ. He himself explains this as the “law of the grain of wheat”. *“I tell you most solemnly, unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies it can yield a rich harvest!”*

Christ, by his death and resurrection, fulfilled this law. In the Eucharist, the Bread of God, he truly becomes the hundred-fold fruit and the life of all of us—now and forever. In this mystery of the Eucharist, in which truly and fully Christ who lives for us, he asks us day after day to fulfill that law with him. It is the definitive expression of the essence of true love.

The essential meaning of love can only be realized by abandoning our narrow and selfish aims and coming out of ourselves to live for others. The fundamental movement that is Christian faith can't be grasped by thinking of individual faith. Think rather of the vital position that we all occupy in relation to the whole Body of Christ. It is true that we aren't Christians for ourselves. We are Christians because God wants and needs our service in the great project that is salvation history. If we remember this we will not fall into the error of thinking that the individual is nothing more than a small cog in a great machine. It is truth that God doesn't love merely the individual but loves everyone as joined together in mutual help and harmony. Yet it is true that God knows and loves each one of us. Jesus is a concrete individual, born of an individual mother and living a particular life, with its own destiny, and died his own death.

The scandal and the greatness of the Christian message is that the destiny of all history depends on an individual, Jesus of Nazareth. Seeing him as he is, it becomes clear that we are called to live for others and with their help, even while God knows and loves each particular person with an unchanging love. Both these facts should profoundly impress us. On the one hand, we should see our Christianity as a way of living for the sake of others. But, on the other hand, we should live in the tremendous security and joy springing from the fact that God loves “me”, this person here and now.

God loves everyone who has a human face, however disfigured and unrecognizable it may be. When we say, “God loves me!” we should also feel the danger of making ourselves unworthy of that love by refusing our responsibilities toward one another. So, we should accept that love and that grace in all its fullness and purity by living for others.

*Wednesday*

## **DO NOT FEAR THE CROSS: St. Oscar Romero**

To each one of us Christ is saying "If you want your life and mission to be fruitful like mine, do like me." Be converted into a seed that lets itself be buried. Let yourself be killed. Do not be afraid. Those who shun suffering will remain alone. No one is more alone than the selfish. But if you give your life for love of others, as I give mine for all, you will reap a great harvest. You will have the deepest satisfactions. Do not fear misunderstandings, threats or even death. The Lord goes with you.

Dear brothers and sisters, especially those of you who hate me, who think I am preaching violence, who defame me and know it isn't true, I ask you as I ask all -be converted. I love you deeply. I do not want you to be on the way to ruin.

I ask the faithful people who listen to me with love and devotion to pardon me for saying this, but it gives me more pleasure that my enemies listen to me. I know that the reason they listen to me is that I bear them a message of love. I don't hate them. I don't want revenge. I wish them no harm. I beg them be converted, to come to be happy with the happiness that your faithful ones have.

One begins to experience faith and conversion when one has the heart of the poor, when one knows that money, political influence, and power are worthless, and that without God we are nothing.

Never forget the poor and suffering of the world. Help others to understand their situation so that they might offer solidarity. This Holy Week we learn again to see the face of Christ-the face of Christ that is the face of a suffering human being, the face of the Crucified, the face of the poor, the face of a saint and the face of every person -and we love each other with the criteria with which we will be judged : "I was hungry and you gave me to eat ".

Without the prophetic dimension the language of contemplation is in danger of having no grip on the history in which God acts and where we meet God. Without the contemplative dimension the language of prophecy can narrow its vision and weaken its perception of God who makes all things new. Our call is to be contemplatives and prophets.

*Thursday*

## **CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST, CHRIST IN THE POOR**

**Bishop Dom Helder Camara**

**It was becoming clear to us that the Eucharistic Christ cannot accept an excess of glorification while the other Eucharist, Christ living among the poor, is oppressed.**

**One day a delegation came to see me here in Recife, Brazil. “Dom Helder a thief has broken into one of our churches and opened the tabernacle. Obviously, he was only interested in the ciborium, and he threw away the hosts, threw them down into the mud. Do you hear, Dom Helder the living Christ thrown into the mud. We have rescued the hosts and carried them in procession back to the church but now we must have a great ceremony of atonement.”**

**On the day of the ceremony, when everybody was assembled, I said “Lord in the name of my brother the thief, I ask forgiveness. He didn’t know what he was doing. He didn’t know you are really present and living in the Eucharist. We are deeply shocked by what he did. My friends we are rightly shocked because he threw the Eucharistic Christ into the mud . But here in this very place Christ lives in the mud all the time. We must open our eyes”. I said that the best possible outcome of our communion with the Body of Christ would be to receive the Eucharist reverently and then open our eyes and to recognize the Eucharist of the poor, the oppressed, the suffering. It will be on this that we will be judged on the last day.**

**It is very important that we as human beings work to glorify the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. We truly love Jesus in the Eucharist. But in doing so we can never make God more God like. We are miserable creatures. But we can help our fellow men and women and help the poor. “I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was in prison, I was sick “. We can glorify love ,love is God. Every community has to find its own way of seeing and enacting love, according to the needs of the time. In our time love is helping to make justice flourish. It is very moving to see the Lord sensitive to other people’s needs. He has eyes to see that they are hungry. He has ears to hear the clamor of his people. We are not just shepherds merely of souls. We are shepherds of human beings, souls and bodies, with everything that involves. My brothers and sisters, adore the Lord in the Holy Eucharist, adore him in each other, adore him in the poor.**

*Friday*

## **HOW SACRIFICE HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great**

When our Lord was handed over to the will of his cruel enemies, they ordered his royal dignity to be mocked and forced him to carry the instrument of his torture and death. It was done to fulfill a prophecy of Isaiah. To the wicked the sight of the Lord carrying his cross was a motive for deriding him. But to the faithful that sight reveals a great mystery. The cross was to be made the instrument of his power and the tool by which he overthrew all the power of his enemies. It became a supreme trophy of his victory!

On the shoulders of his unconquerable patience he carried the sign of salvation for everyone. It became something all nations of the earth would worship. It would be used to strengthen all Christ's disciples in their work for God's Kingdom. He said: "Anyone who doesn't take up a cross and follow me isn't worthy of me!"

The Jerusalem temple was built to be a place of sacrifice. But that meant in practice that people went there to offer something of their own—ideally something that cost them dear—in symbol of offering themselves to God. Now symbols have been replaced by realities. Christ shows the whole world the new and authentic sacrifice that reconciles all peoples—if they will accept it—to God and God's rule over our world.

O marvelous power of the cross, the glory of the Lord's passion. No tongue can fittingly or fully describe this. Here is the judgment seat of the Lord. All now come before him and all have seen how they have or have not offered themselves really with Christ to God. Christ's example of love is the sovereign judgment passed on the entire non-loving world. Here the sovereignty of the Crucified is revealed.

You drew all things to yourself, Lord, when you stretched out your hands all the day long to a people that denied and opposed you. And now, at last, the whole world is brought to proclaim your majesty. You have drawn all things to yourself, to your love, and shown them the new world created according to God and God's will. The veil of the Temple was torn in two and the Holy of Holies given to a worthy priest who knew how to offer sacrifice in spirit and in truth.

You drew all things to yourself so that the whole human race could worship you in spirit and in truth, a worship celebrated everywhere in sacramental form, a worship that fulfills and proclaims what you enacted by offering your own body and blood. No other victim is needed. We are to offer our hearts and our lives as Christ bids us. As there is now a single sacrifice so now there is a single Kingdom formed of all the peoples of the earth. Now we know clearly and fully all that we need to do to please our God. Now we see the path into his eternal peace and joy. It is eternal love with all our hearts, and minds and strength.

*Saturday*

# ACCEPTING HUMAN WEAKNESS WITH JESUS

A reflection from Poverty of Spirit by Fr. Johannes Baptist Metz

Have we really understood the impoverishment that Christ endured? All was taken from him during the passion, even including the love that drove him to the cross. No longer did he savor his own love of God, no longer did he feel any spark of enthusiasm. His heart gave out, and a feeling of utter helplessness came over him. Truly he emptied himself. God's merciful hand no longer sustained him. God's countenance was hidden during the passion.

Christ gaped into the darkness of nothingness and abandonment where God seem to be no longer present. The Son of Man reached his destiny, stretched taut between a despising earth that had rejected him and a faceless heaven thundering God's "No!" to sinful humankind. Jesus paid the price of human futility; he became utterly poor. In this total renunciation Jesus perfected and proclaimed in action what had taken place in the depths of his being. He professed and accepted our humanity; he took on and endured our lot; he stepped down from his divinity. He came to us where we really are—with our broken dreams and lost hopes, with the meaning of existence slipping through our fingers. He came and stood with us. He came struggling with his whole heart to help us say "Yes!" to our innate human poverty.

God's fidelity to us is what gives us the courage to be true to ourselves! The legacy of God's total commitment to humankind, the proof of God's fidelity to our poverty, is the cross. The cross is the sacrament of poverty of spirit, and so the sacrament of authentic humanness in a sinful world. It is a sign that one human remained true to his humanity, that one person accepted his humanity in full and did so in obedience to God.

Hanging in utter weakness on the cross, Christ revealed the divine meaning of human existence. It says something for everyone. We hear that some Jews and some pagans find the cross scandalous and foolish. Today too, for enlightened humanitarians the cross often provokes only irony or weary skepticism. Such advocates of another kind of "humanity" are indifferent to the cross, too much so even to find it a scandal. What, then, is the cross you to and me?

The Cross reveals that no one is exempted from the poverty lived there. That we don't like this was true even for Jesus' disciples: "*You will all fall away because of me this night.*" Judas' betrayal may have been the result of frenzied impatience with Jesus' poverty, or a futile attempt to pressure Jesus into using his divine resources instead of accepting human impotence. In any case, it is not an isolated thing. Poverty of spirit is always being betrayed by disciples in the Church when they criticize and subvert it to avoid living it. Perhaps that is why Jesus gave us the parable of the grain of wheat. "*Unless a grain of wheat (like you) falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" Will you accept the call to die so you can live such poverty?