



Monday of Holy Week **March 26, 2018**

In the stories we tell one another about our lives we already know the endings. Going through the original experience the first time, however, was another matter.

The ending shapes everything in a story: physical details of time and place, twists in the unfolding plot, interior thoughts and emotions of characters—including ourselves. It's the same with stories in the Bible. What happened to people and communities of faith “in the end” is designed to put believers in touch with the underlying drama and meaning of events that often seemed ordinary, chaotic or opaque when they originally unfolded in the “now” of the present.

So, are our life and faith stories really true? Or, when we try to explain what really happened, who we really are and what this life we're living together really means, are we making it up as we go along? What about the familiar stories we inherit and know by rote, especially stories from Scripture? We call the week ahead “Holy” because it tells the story of the suffering and death of Jesus. We know the story ends in Resurrection, but is it true? Can we trust it? What does the story really mean?

The First Reading on this Monday of Holy Week gives voice to Isaiah, perhaps the most poetic storyteller in the Old Testament, speaking in the first person as God: “Here is my servant, my chosen one who will bring justice to the nations.” We get the point immediately. The Messiah the Jews longed for was Jesus who suffered, died and was raised on Easter. In the Gospel reading, John tells the story of Jesus visiting his dear friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary less than two weeks before his death on the Cross. These saint-heroes of our Christian story were devoted to Jesus, while the villains—the thief Judas and the hypocritical high priests—were already plotting to kill him. Again, the point of the story appears to be simple: good people believe in Jesus and evil people don't. Be one of the good ones.

But Holy Week is inviting us to enter into something much more challenging—and rewarding—than an easy affirmation of faith in ancient stories and familiar beliefs. Isaiah couldn't have imagined the specific arrival of Jesus of Nazareth in history, but he does have God deliver a very relevant, personal and direct message: “I have grasped YOU by the hand and set YOU as a covenant for the people.” We know that Jesus of Nazareth knew the book of Isaiah very well. Clearly, he applied the words we hear today to himself. He asks us to do the same. And John the Evangelist addressed his Gospel to people in the early Church whom he knew were facing threats and rejection for proclaiming their faith in Jesus. The way forward in faith would have struck them as anything but easy. It won't be for us, either.

We can't walk with Jesus and the Church this week if remain on the outside of the story, on the surface of just “what happened.” We have to go inside our own story, into the depths of our hearts and minds in order to know what we have really experienced, to realize where we have encountered the living God... and when we have refused to recognize him. We have to pray hard to satisfy our conscience that we are at least trying to serve the truth in the stories we tell. And our Church asks us to enter into the story of Holy Week—to “walk the talk”—including all of our experience in the story: faith and doubt, sin and grace, joy and sorrow. Only by facing our lives as they are and seeing the world around us as it is—while trusting that God will be revealed in our midst—can we accompany Jesus on the Way of the Cross.

The story of Holy Week does indeed end in Resurrection. And we believe the story tells the truth. We believe the Resurrection of Christ gives new shape and meaning to all of creation, human history and every moment of our lives. But we can't hope to experience the blessings of the end of the story if we're not willing to put our feet on the path of ordinary grace in the challenges and suffering of today.

-Mr. Jim Linhares, Assistant Principal for Mission