

THE CHARACTERS OF JESUS' PASSION ARE NOT JUST FIGURES FROM LONG AGO—THEY ALSO LIVE INSIDE OF US.

Reflection for Palm Sunday, Cycle A

The following reflection was written by Fr. Joe Slattery.

The Word of God is like a mirror held up before all of us. The story of Our Lord's Passion is not simply about characters that lived two thousand years ago—it's about ourselves too. Each of these characters in the Passion narrative exemplifies a part of us—maybe a part that we're not even aware of. Let's take a closer look at them for a few moments. What kind of people were they really? First of all, there was...

The Crowd: A few days earlier, people had welcomed Jesus to the city with palm branches, and hailed him as their Messiah. Some, perhaps many of those who were present at Jesus' trial, were the same people who earlier had acclaimed him. It's easy to condemn them, but how many of us, if we are honest with ourselves, are not so different. It's hard to go against the crowd, and our praise can turn so quickly into criticism and even condemnation when people don't fit in with our wishes. And then there was...

Judas: Before we allow ourselves to get indignant over his betrayal, we need to pause for a moment and look at the Judas in ourselves. How often have we betrayed the confidence of another person? How often have we, by our negative remarks, undermined the good being done by another? How often have we remained cowardly and silent when we should have spoken up in defense of someone? Yes, we're all Judases sometimes.

Peter was ready to promise Jesus the whole world—he would die for him, he had said. But then fear took over, and he cursed and swore and denied him. Peter didn't really know himself and his own limitations—he was all promises but no follow-through.

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undermined the good being done by another?***

There's also a Peter in each of us. It's easy to promise the Lord our loyalty when we join in the rote responses and hymns at Mass, but when it is going to cost us something—our time or our money or our comfort or our popularity, how many of us pull back just like Peter did?

Caiaphas was the kind of person who looked good dressed up in his high priest's clothes, but what was inside? He was at the center of the conspiracy to kill Jesus, and he was happy to provide the murderers with some appearance of legality. We all hate hypocrisy, but what about ourselves? We know too how to look good when our motives are less than good.

The Lying Witness: I suppose one of the lowest forms of humanity is the person who tells lies about others— the person who spreads rumors that undermine the good name of another. Some people have terrible tongues. They too will have to take their place alongside those lying witnesses who condemned Jesus.

Pilate dealt with his dilemma by washing his hands. Pilate represents all those people who don't want to take any responsibility for the evil they do, or those who prefer to isolate themselves from the suffering of others and live as if it wasn't happening. These are the people who like to say, "That's your problem," or, "It's not my business." Yes, those people are still around today, washing their hands. But, no matter how much they wash, their hands are not clean. Only mercy and compassion will clean their hands.

The Soldiers are mocking Jesus. They're bullies. We don't have to go back to Roman times to meet this type of person: the kind who is ready to attack when a person is vulnerable—the kind who abuses women or children— the kind of person who loves to hear someone being put down, and is always ready to add something to it.

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Like the soldiers, these people are cowards. They are brave only when others are vulnerable, or when there is a crowd to cheer them on. Sometimes we can be like that too.

So, as we gather here together to remember the immense love of the Lord who suffered for us, it's not a time to feel sorry for Jesus in his Passion. Rather, it's a time to let this terrible story hold a mirror up to ourselves—to take an honest look in that mirror, and perhaps to make some changes.

Reflection Question

How do we deal with crises of faith?

The Coalminer Timekeeper who Offered Hope.

Reflecting on today's reading, Jay Cormier tells the following inspiring story.

Years ago, there was a massive cave-in at a coal mine in northern England. Twelve miners were trapped behind a wall of fallen rock and debris. When the rock and coal dust finally settled, each of the twelve miners called out his name. No one seemed to be hurt—but everyone realized the seriousness of the situation. All they could do was wait and hope rescuers would reach them in time.

As they waited in the darkness, one miner yelled out, "Timekeeper! Can you tell us how we're doing for time? How long do you think we can last?"

The timekeeper said, "It was ten thirty just before the accident. There's twelve of us and about 14 feet to this pocket we're in. If we keep still, we've got two hours of oxygen, by my reckoning. We'll be all right. We'll be fine."

No one questioned or doubted the timekeeper's words. They sat quietly, listening for any sound of digging.

As the time passed, a miner would call "Time?" and the timekeeper would announce, with a momentary flare of a match, "Fifteen minutes. We'll be fine, lads." the periods between the time markings seemed longer, yet the timekeeper always marked off small increments, never more than 20 minutes—and each time mark included words of encouragement and hope from the keeper of the watch.

We are being like the soldiers in today's gospel when we bully others or take advantage of people when they are vulnerable.

When it seemed that there were only a few minutes of oxygen left, the sweet sound of hammering and digging was heard. After what seemed like an eternity, a draft of air and a shaft of light broke through. Of the twelve men trapped, all but one survived. The rescued miners were stunned that the timekeeper alone died. The village priest said, "It's a miracle that any of you survived! You've been trapped down there for over six hours!"

As they carried out the timekeeper's body, one of the miners took the pocket watch from his coworker's vest. It had been broken in the accident. The hands of the watch were stopped at ten thirty.

In "emptying" himself of his own fear and despair in order to be a vehicle of hope to his fellow miners, the timekeeper imitates the selfless compassion of Jesus, the Christ "who emptied himself for our sakes, accepting even death on a cross." It is that same "attitude" of love and compassion that we must embrace if we are to become the people God has called us to be. Like Christ, we must "empty" ourselves of our own wants and needs for the sake of others; we must teach out to heal the hurt and comfort the despairing around us despite our own sense of betrayal; we must realize how our actions affect others and consider the impact our decisions and

actions have on the,. Our remembering the passion, death and resurrection of Christ this Holy Week calls us to embrace the attitude of Christ's compassion and total selflessness, to become servants of God by becoming servants to one another.

The Easter Triduum -One Celebration with Three Parts

Thursday afternoon Lent ends and Thursday evening, the Easter Triduum begins with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and continues through Easter Day concluding with Evening Prayer (mainly for those who live in monasteries)

While in popular culture the season of Christmas receives the most attention, the truth is that the Easter Triduum is the culmination or high point of the entire liturgical year. The Triduum begins with the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday and concludes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday evening.

The term Triduum is from the Latin tres dies (three days). But is the Triduum three or four days – Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday? In liturgical time the church follows the ancient Jewish practice of a day starting the evening before. So the first day of the Triduum is Thursday evening to Friday evening. The second day is Friday evening to Saturday evening and the third day is Saturday evening to Sunday evening.

Our church tells us that the Triduum is not so much three celebrations, (the Lord's Supper, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil) but one continuous celebration with three parts. The unified nature of three-in-one liturgies is underlined by the omission of a concluding rite on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. These two liturgies are “left hanging” so to speak, incomplete without that which follows. It is as if the omission of a concluding rite on Holy Thursday and Good Friday is saying to us: “We are not done yet. To be continued.” Likewise, Good Friday and the Easter vigil do not have the normal introductory rites. On Good Friday the presider processes in silence and prostrates himself in the sanctuary. The Easter Vigil begins with the assembly gathering outdoors around the Easter Fire. Even though the Triduum is the most sacred and most important three days in our church's liturgical year, they are not holy days of obligation. To do so would be stating the obvious, like making it obligatory for us to celebrate Independence Day.

Meditation

All disciples come to this same dark night when our faith in the Lord is shaken. There may be earthquakes and explicit denials, troubling dreams and profitable betrayals. Or we may simply fall asleep when our presence is needful, or run away when called upon to risk a stand. We may join with the crowds and call for Barabbas over Jesus, even shout for the blood of the innocent. We may be the ones who jeer and mock, or simply the ones who say nothing in the face of injustice.

The night when our faith is shaken is the bleakest night our soul can know. But the disciples survive it to become the apostles, turning the shame of desertion into the courage of martyrdom. The only one who is not transformed is the one who condemned himself for his failure, fearing God's justice and forgetting God's mercy.

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