NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Our share in his suffering

Roger Karban | Apr. 1, 2012 Spiritual Reflections

Few of us form our images of Jesus? passion and death from the four Gospel narratives. Most of us shape them from pious devotions, the Stations of the Cross, Holy Week homilies, or, for us older folk, from the old *Tre Ore* (Three Hour) Good Friday service. Encouraged to zero in on the suffering and pain our sins caused the Son of God, we?re led not only to experience deep sorrow for those sins, but also to resolve never to commit them again. Nothing wrong with such a process, but it isn?t what our four evangelists intend us to take from their Passion narratives.

Palm/Passion Sun.
Is. 50:4-
Psalm 22
Philippians 2:6-11
Mark 14:12-15:47 or 15:1-39

In Mark?s Gospel, there?s almost no mention of Jesus? physical suffering and pain. Only a handful of the 119 verses even refer to it. The actual crucifixion -- the event we?re expected to spend hours reflecting on -- is described in just four words: ?Then they crucified him.? None of the four Gospel accounts even mention that he was nailed to the cross. (That point only surfaces in John 20 when Thomas wants to put his finger in the nail holes.) If our evangelists want us to focus on Jesus? physical suffering, they do a lousy job.

Mark tells of Jesus? suffering, but he glides over the physical and emphasizes the psychological. He has a good reason for doing this.

No matter what unique theology each Christian author puts forth, they all agree that those who eventually achieve the life of Jesus must also die with Jesus.

How then does someone die with Jesus?

Paul reminds his Philippian community at the beginning of today?s second reading (in a line for some reason omitted from our liturgical passage), ?Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus.? In other words, we?re expected to have the same frame of mind as the risen Jesus.

Nowhere in his letters does the apostle more perfectly describe such a mindset. ?Though he was in the form of God ... he emptied himself ... he humbled himself ... becoming obedient to the point of death ... because of this, God greatly exalted him.? Jesus? exaltation takes place only because he first emptied himself.

Though we?ve traditionally interpreted ?he was in the form of God? as referring to Jesus? pre-existence as God, and ?he emptied himself? as describing his becoming human, Pauline scholars don?t always support such a reading. Instead of reading ?in the form of God? against John 1, these experts hear it against Genesis 1. In this well-known creation story, the priestly author speaks about all human beings having been created in the ?image and likeness of God.? Jesus is in God?s form because he?s a human being.

Paul, and the early Christian community that originally penned this primitive hymn, believed that Jesus didn?t emphasize the divine aspect of his personality. He ?emptied himself? of such claims. He delved so deeply into his humanity that he identified with all other human beings, even the lowest slave. It?s this kind of death -- epitomized by his crucifixion -- that merited him exaltation and eventually the name above all other names: *Yahweh*. It?s this kind of death our sacred authors expect us to imitate.

Self-emptying demands a constant giving of ourselves for others. Anyone who?s attempted such giving can testify that it?s a commitment to psychological suffering. No matter its eventual rewards, love always hurts.

Jesus suffers because he gave himself to others. One of his best friends betrays him; another denies he even knows him. Everyone deserts him in Gethsemane; the crowd chooses a murderer over him. His teachings are misinterpreted and, as he is dying, the people to whom he committed himself ?revile him.?

Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller always taught that today?s first reading contains the best biblical definition of a true follower of God. ?Morning after morning,? the prophet announces, ?Yahweh opens my ear that I may hear.? Every morning, the true disciple of God hits the floor listening for what God wants him or her to do on that specific day. Our sacred authors agree: We best do this by listening to the voices and needs of others.

This year, as we listen to the Passion narrative, we should not only thank Jesus for dying for us, but also thank him for showing us how to die for others.

[Roger Vermalen Karban is a priest of the Belleville, Ill., diocese and pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Renault, Ill. He holds a licenciate in theology from the Gregorian University in Rome and did his scripture studies at St. Louis University. He currently teaches scripture courses at St. Louis University and Southwestern Illinois College.]

This Sunday scripture commentary appears in full in NCR's sister publication Celebration, [1] a worship and homiletic resource. Preview a complete issue online at CelebrationPublications.org [1].

Celebration also posts **Daily Bread** [2], reflections on each day's Scripture reading. You may want to bookmark it. It's a great way to begin the day.

Celebrations editor, Pat Marrin, also maintains a daily blog called Pencil Preaching that combines his cartooning skills and a reflection on current events and the day's reading. That is available at **celebrationpublications.org/pencilpreaching** [3]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-29 10:23*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/spiritual-reflections/our-share-his-suffering

Links:
[1] http://celebrationpublications.org/
[2] http://celebrationpublications.org/dailybread
[3] http://celebrationpublications.org/pencilpreaching