Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

March 25, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Terror on every side!” (Jeremiah20:10).

Jer 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

As we approach Holy Week, the Scriptures focus more and more on the coming struggle Jesus will face as he goes to Jerusalem for his final Passover. The debates in the fourth Gospel are hard to read because of the polemic nature injected later into the quarrels between the early church and the Rabbinic leaders after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE.

The decision of the author to refer to Jesus’ opponents as “Jews” is odd since everyone in this conflict over Jesus’ claims regarding God was a brother Jew, not some separate entity. The texts unfortunately contributed to subsequent anti-Semitic bias with catastrophic results in the history of both the church and Judaism.

The more significant focus for Christian readers as we prepare for Holy Week is to consider the intense suffering Jesus was experiencing as he realized he was going to die. A major source of guidance and strength was undoubtedly the Scriptures themselves, the Psalms about suffering and the texts from the Isaiah and Jeremiah (today’s first reading) that mirrored Jesus’ coming trial. He knew many of these texts by heart and wove them into his prayers about what was happening to him and how it somehow would fulfill his mission.

Jeremiah also experienced intense mental suffering during his own time, including a feeling that God had “seduced” him into service, putting the Word into him like “fire in his bones” he could barely endure but also could not turn away from. He is known as a “man of constant sorrow” among the prophets, and perhaps Jesus experienced

the same inner struggles and sense of futility as he entered the final conflict that would lead to his arrest, torture, abandonment by his followers, then Roman crucifixion, a hideous death designed to humiliate and break its victims in a public spectacle to deter others from defying Roman authority.

Jesus retreats across the Jordan to where John had been baptizing, perhaps imagining John's agony as he sat in a darkened dungeon listening to the party above that would end with his decapitation. Accounts of Jesus' agony in the garden say he "sweat blood" as he prayed to escape this death, yet he accepted it as part of God's plan.

Holy Week is our invitation to participate in the Passion of Jesus. Even a moving liturgical experience cannot begin to draw us into the reality Jesus endured as a human being. Just to see and feel the enormous suffering going on every day in our world is hard enough. Have we become numb to it because it is so continuous and ever present? Palm/Passion Sunday is our chance to open our hearts to the anguish of those waiting at the border for refuge, the victims of war and terrorism, the many who feel forgotten and betrayed by the world. Jesus embraced this universal suffering in order to redeem us. Has Lent prepared us to go the final mile with him?

Advertisement