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“How can there be any good in goodbye?”

Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord

Isa 52:13--53:11; Ps 31; Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1—19:42

With perhaps 70 years and two generations after the events to reflect on the crucified and risen Christ, the author the fourth Gospel transformed the synoptic Gospels into a richly liturgical and theological meditation. The seven signs that reveal Jesus as I AM, the divine name, recapitulate the seven days of creation in Genesis and anticipate the seven seals in the Book of Revelation. Biblical “7” stands for completion, therefore even God rested. But this is not the end. It points to an Eighth Day of Creation, a new beginning. This is why Christians celebrated Eucharist on Sunday, the day after the sabbath and the day of the Resurrection. The world was transformed because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The readings for Good Friday begin with Isaiah’s final song depicting the rejection and death of God’s Servant. It movingly describes a victim so marred he was barely recognizable as human, ignored and spurned, a man of suffering. Shockingly, witnesses realize that he was suffering for them, pierced for their offenses, crushed for their sins so they could be healed. Because he submitted, he will be glorified and be a light and justification for many. This theme is affirmed in the reading from

Hebrews.

The long Passion account in John's Gospel, often read by several voices and the assembly, draws us into the drama as Jesus is arrested, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter and abandoned by all the disciples except the "Beloved Disciple," who describes his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus' encounter with Pilate, his scourging and crowning, then the cry of the mob that he be crucified. From the cross, Jesus entrusts his mother to the disciple, breathes his last, is taken down and placed hurriedly in a borrowed tomb just as the Sabbath approaches.

A silence falls over the church and we enter a time of desolation to reflect on the absence of God and the emptiness that death inflicts on the living. Darkness shrouds the heart; hope seems distant and inconsolable grief fills the earth as the women retreat and wait to return to complete the burial after the sabbath. If this is goodbye, then has death conquered love and was God, if there is a God, unable or unwilling to stop this violence against an innocent, or the suffering and injustice so ceaselessly inflicted on the world? We are left to ponder the weight of this despair, which pulls us like a pitiless stone into helpless freefall.

What Jesus endured we ought to absorb in prayer before we rush to fill the void with the happy ending that Easter has become, our Good Friday turning to full restoration after a bad weekend. The faith of Jesus' followers was a traumatic void before it was a rebirth in hope. It overwhelmed them like a slow earthquake that upended reality. It was the chaos before Creation awaiting the hovering Spirit who enabled them to make passage to a New Creation and the total transformation only believers can fully embrace. The women, including Mary Magdalen, went to the tomb to anoint a corpse. Only because of their encounter with the Risen Christ did they begin to grasp the meaning of what had occurred, and this sent them running to tell the others.

The Gospels witness to a real event both timeless and in time that is accessible only with eyes of faith. The church is founded on a mystery once described as the end of history appearing in the middle. It launched believers into the world to share a revolution of the heart meant to change the world. Easter is our invitation to enter the Beloved Community Jesus offers to everyone ready follow him by dying to self in order to rise to new life filled with the Holy Spirit and alive with joy, love and gratitude.

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