



Seònaid Alder reminds us that Holy Week celebrates love beyond anything we can imagine – but which we can try to imitate.

SUNDAY 10 APRIL

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Regardless of the consequences

Procession: Luke 19:28-40; Mass: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 – 23:56

Have you watched the film *Of Gods and Men*? To the deeply moving musical accompaniment of Tchaikovsky's "Dying Swan" from the ballet *Swan Lake*, the monks of Tibhirine share their last community meal in their monastery. Within hours, they will be captured, used as hostages and martyred. In a profound re-enactment of Jesus' Last Supper, they eat together, knowing they have irrevocably decided to stay alongside the people of Tibhirine, regardless of the consequences. They know that they will die in their efforts to protect, support and defend others. United to Jesus in his passion, death – and resurrection – they share their community's Last Supper.

Today, Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus' unwavering resolve. As he rode a donkey into Jerusalem, he knew that the hatred and violence which contradicted everything he had said and done would soon be directed against him.

If I were a film director watching the events of Holy Week unfold, what background music would I choose?

Sweet Lord, fill me with the love that doesn't look for an audience and doesn't count the cost of loving. Amen.

MONDAY 11 APRIL

True love

Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11

Was it a family "thank you" celebration? Jesus had come to Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead. The trio laid on a meal in Jesus' honour – and then Mary surprised everyone by pouring a jar of perfume over his feet.

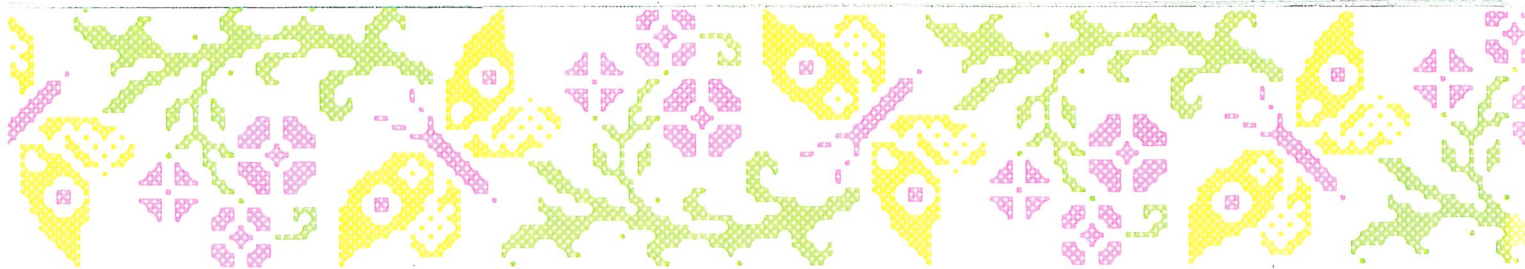
Mary's gratitude went beyond "ordinary". In a spontaneous, crazily extravagant act, she picked up the nearest thing to hand – a pot of designer perfume – for the customary anointing of Jesus' feet.

Judas complained: Mary could have sold it and given the money to poor people. Jesus disagreed. True love is extravagant.

Jesus, Martha, Mary and Lazarus would never again eat together in Bethany. As they celebrated their mutual love, trust and thanksgiving, their meal prefigured the Eucharist. Within a few days Jesus would show that true love has no limits.

Soon, Lazarus would also die – the authorities could not cope with living proof of Jesus' power over death. True love is faithful.

Jesus, my Lord and my God, I give you my heart and my soul. Amen.



TUESDAY 12 APRIL

Troubled in spirit

Isaiah 49:1-6;

John 13:21-33. 36-38

Jesus was “troubled in spirit”. Following a road to unimaginable pain within the matter of a few hours, who was helping him to carry his burden and to put his mind at ease? This was the last meal that Jesus and his friends would share, but he was realistic about their weakness at his time of greatest need.

Judas would sneak away and initiate the process which would lead to Jesus’ arrest, trial and execution.

Peter blustered that he would follow Jesus to death and he would – eventually – but not now. Instead, Peter would deny that he had ever known his role model and closest friend.

John would follow, but at a distance because he would take responsibility for Mary.

The others would run away and hide.

Jesus would stand alone before Herod and Pilate, nobody at his side to speak on his behalf.

“Troubled in spirit”? More likely, feeling absolutely heartbroken, desperately alone and utterly betrayed.

I love you, Jesus, my love above all things. Never let me be separated from you. Grant that I may love you always. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 13 APRIL

The question of Judas

Isaiah 50:4-9; Matthew 26:14-25

For two thousand years, people have remembered Judas as a thief and a traitor with a price of thirty pieces of silver for his treachery. What a legacy!

In following Jesus, was Judas expecting to become the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the coming Messianic kingdom, wrongly expecting an earthly realm?

Did Judas think that betraying Jesus to the authorities might force him to act and prove his identity?

When Judas went back to the high priests, was his futile gesture of returning his payment a sign of realisation that he would never become Chancellor of the Exchequer? Or despair on recognising the enormity of his betrayal and total lack of words to describe his sorrow, shame and inability to prevent the death of his innocent friend?

We don’t know: our best suggestions are pure guesswork.

Neither do we know if, at his last breath, Judas rediscovered the words, “I’m sorry” and was welcomed home by an all-loving God whose forgiveness is far greater than ours could ever be.

Loving Lord, forgive me my sins. Help me to get up again. Change my heart! Amen.

THURSDAY 14 APRIL

MAUNDY THURSDAY

What of Jesus?

Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper: Exodus 12:1-8. 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

Who should have washed the hot, dusty, tired feet of the disciples when they entered the Upper Room? Surely not the host? No wonder the disciples were shocked when Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist and took the task upon himself! Yet, however embarrassed they might have been, only Peter – temporarily – kicked up a fuss.

How did Judas feel, knowing that he was about to betray Jesus? Did he perhaps hope that Jesus might be unaware of his treachery? Did he squirm inside, wising that he’d not taken the thirty pieces of silver?

What of Jesus, knowing that one of the Twelve was a traitor and ten were cowards? Did he take a deep breath, grit his teeth and carry on anyway, determined to teach them a practical lesson? How did Jesus find in himself the humility to generously serve his less-than-adequate friends and then speak lovingly to them all?

What would I have done in his place?

Dearest Jesus, teach me to be generous, to love you as you deserve to be loved, to give and not to count the cost. Amen.

FRIDAY 15 APRIL
GOOD FRIDAY

Beyond words

The Celebration of the Passion of the Lord: Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1 – 19:42

The violent death of a loved one, whether at someone else's hands or their own, is an unforgettable agony. The powerlessness to prevent that death only increases the suffering. Experts talk about "integration" and "moving on" but, however bright the future, the aching emptiness and unanswered questions never entirely disappear. Unexpected reminders – however small – forever bring unsought heartache and tears. Life has changed permanently.

Mary and her companions heard Jesus' screams as he was nailed to the cross – and could do nothing to protect and comfort him. Mary didn't want John as her son: it was Jesus whom she yearned to hold in her arms. Jesus' dying gift of a substitute didn't ease her excruciating agony. Regardless of her future resurrection joy, Mary's "now" was unbearably and indelibly painful.

People who truly understand the depths of human misery have themselves experienced it, have "been there, done that". Their hug goes beyond words.

That's why we need Mary's hug. She stood at the foot of her son's cross – and came through it.

Dearest Mother, be very close to anybody struggling to come to terms with the violent death of a loved one. Help them to see the light. Comfort them in their agony. Amen.

SATURDAY 16 APRIL
HOLY SATURDAY

We all need a Salome

The Easter Vigil: Exodus 14:15 – 15:1; Romans 6:3-11; Luke 24:1-12

Who was Salome? Some traditions suggest that she was Jesus' aunt, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John. Salome was one of the women at the foot of the cross. She was one of the three women who planned to anoint Jesus' body, worried about moving the heavy stone at the tomb's entrance and were the first witnesses to the resurrection.

Salome possibly knew Jesus throughout his life and not just during his public ministry. She was a faithful follower, supportively present at some of the most important moments of Jesus' time on earth – and that's all we know of her.

On our own life journey, some people are present at the worst and the best of our times, faithfully offering their encouragement and support, showing us that life is worth living to the full. We all need a Salome: someone who doesn't need to be big and famous but whose big, loving heart is unforgettable.

Loving Lord, thank you for the people who, like Salome, help to make life worth living. Fill them with Easter joy. Reward them for their constant love. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

I sometimes forget the times of resurrection and new life which I have experienced in my life.

Can I spend a few minutes remembering and thanking God for a time when there was a sudden sunburst of new life and hope?

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"If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

SUNDAY 17 APRIL

EASTER SUNDAY

Alleluia!

Acts 10:34. 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; John 20:1-9

What did the disciples think when Mary Magdalene burst into the Upper Room where they were hiding away from the authorities? How could Jesus' tomb be empty? Mary had stayed with Jesus until the very end. She had helped with his burial whilst they had hidden from the authorities. Had the experience damaged her mind?

Only Peter and John decided to investigate further. The others, forgetting that they were now unimportant to the establishment, self-protectively stayed put.

Were they embarrassed that Mary Magdalene had disregarded her own safety in going to Calvary and to the tomb? Did they secretly admire her courage? Did they worry that she might have revealed their hiding place and endangered them? Why didn't they want to see for themselves if her unlikely tale were true?

Mary stayed behind after Peter and John had left – and met the risen Jesus. Her loving heart "that gave all it had to give and more" made all the difference.

Risen Lord Jesus, fill everyone whom I know and love with your resurrection light and joy. Give new life to those who are struggling to survive. Give hope to those who most need it. Bless us all this Easter. Amen.

Christ is Risen!