

Holy Week Message 2007

The days leading up to Easter have been marked by Christians with special observances for many centuries. Recent decades have witnessed a move away from the solemnities of this Holy Week towards a more celebratory expression of Christianity. The sentiment has been expressed that we are 'Easter People' - we should move beyond excessive emphasis on sin and repentance. Now that this claim has been abroad for several decades its credibility is no longer unassailable. Empirically, churches which have embraced this stance are not exhibiting evidence of particular success measured either spiritually or numerically. What is more, our own experience suggests that sin is a problem, one we each have and repentance is not a dated, no longer applicable concept. To put matters bluntly, Jesus did die for our sins. To quote the old adage, "No Cross then No Crown." If this applies to our Lord and to the saints surely it also applies to us. There can be no Easter joy without the agony of Good Friday first. What's more, this is not an arbitrary temporal sequence but a logical necessity. The ugly, alienating reality of sin must be faced and dealt with before there can be victory and joy. To be full followers of Jesus we too must go through, experience something of, the destructive reality of sin, our sin, before we can rejoice in the victory which Christ has won for us. It is this going to the Cross that Holy Week is designed to help us accomplish.

How are we to achieve this focus on the Cross of Jesus this Holy Week? First, opportunities for public worship abound, scheduled at staggered times, it is hoped that folks can make at least some of the special services. Secondly, even if making services is problematic, private Scripture reading and prayer is always within our reach. The place to start is with the Passion Narratives in each Gospel. The Prayer Book Eucharist lectionary places every detail of all four Gospel accounts of our Lord's last week before us this Holy Week. We would do well to follow this lead and read all four accounts of the Passion ourselves. We should read slowly, carefully, thoughtfully.

Another aid I have found helpful is the reading of sermons from the past. Below is a small selection from an old, but very powerful, Good Friday sermon from the year 1597, given by a man named Lancelot Andrewes. [Don't be put off by a few odd words, it is a gem.] May God bless you this Holy Week of 2007.

Fr Hebb

In the course of justice we say, and say truly, when a party is put to death, that the executioner cannot be said to be the cause of death; nor the sheriff, by whose commandment he does it; neither yet the judge by whose sentence; nor the twelve men by whose verdict; nor the law itself, by whose authority it is proceeded in. For, God forbid we should indict these, or any of these, of murder. *Solum peccatum homicida*; (the murderer is solely sin) sin and sin only, is the murder. Sin, I say, either of the party that suffers; or of some other, by whose means, or for whose cause, he is put to death.

Now, Christ's own sin it was not that He died for. That is most evident. Not so much by His own challenge, *Quis ex vobis arguit Me de peccato?* (Who among you convicts Me of sin?) as by the report of His judge, who openly professed that he had examined Him, and 'found no fault in Him.' 'No, nor yet Herod,' for being sent to him and examined by him also, nothing worthy death was found in him. And therefore, calling for water and washing his hands he protests his own innocency of the blood of this 'Just Man;' thereby pronouncing Him Just, and

void of any cause in Himself of His own death.

It must then necessarily be the sin of some others, for whose sake Christ Jesus was thus pierced. And if we ask, who those others be? or whose sins they were? the Prophet Isaiah tells us, *Posuit super Eum iniquitates omnium nostrum*, 'He laid upon Him the transgressions of us all;' who should, even for those our many, great and grievous transgressions, have eternally been pierced, in body and soul, with torment and sorrows of a never-dying death, had not He stepped between us and the blow, and received it in His own body; even the dint of the wrath of God to come upon us. So that it was the sin of our polluted hands that pierced His hands, the swiftness of our feet to do evil that nailed His feet, the wicked devices of our heads that gored His head, and the wretched desires of our hearts that pierced His heart. We that 'look upon,' it is we that 'pierced Him;' and it is we that 'pierced Him,' that are willed to 'look upon Him.' Which brings it home to us, to me myself that speak, and you yourselves that hear; and applies it most effectually to every one of us, who evidently seeing that we were the cause of this His piercing, if our hearts be not too hard, ought to have remorse to be pierced with it.

When, for delivering to David a few loaves, Abimelech and the Priests were by Saul put to the sword, if David did then acknowledge with grief of heart and say, 'I, even I, am the cause of the death of thy father and all his house;'--when he was but only the occasion of it, and not that direct neither - may not we, nay ought not we much more justly and deservedly say of this piercing of Christ our Saviour, that we verily, even we, are the cause thereof, as verily we are, even the principals in this murder; and the Jews and others, on whom we seek to derive it, but only accessories and instrumental causes thereof. Which point we ought as continually, so seriously to think of; and that no less than the former. The former, to stir up compassion in ourselves, over Him that was thus pierced; the latter, to work deep remorse in our hearts, for being authors of it. That He was pierced, will make our hearts melt with compassion over Christ. That He was pierced by us that look on Him, if our hearts be not 'flint' as Job says, or as 'the nether mill-stone' will breed remorse over ourselves, wretched sinners as we are.