

APRIL 14<sup>TH</sup>, 2019: PALM SUNDAY  
Isaiah 50:4-7    Philippians 2:6-11    Luke 22:14-23:56

One reason we have four gospels and not just one revolves around the early Christian conviction that there's more than one way to experience the risen Jesus in our lives. This is especially true when it comes to the gospel Passion Narratives. Each narrative provides us with a different dimension of Jesus' dying and rising; a different way for each of us to become another Christ.

Our sacred authors didn't think the way we do. We basically analyze when we think, tearing the object of our thought apart, imitating the classic Greek philosophers whose goal was always to come up with an either/or answer for any problem. Our biblical writers, on the other hand, thought semitically, not Greek. Instead of analyzing they synthesized, instead of eventually reaching an either/or conclusion, their thought process always finished with a both/and pronouncement, constantly providing at least several ways of looking at the same person or situation. One of the classic Jewish sayings is, "Where three rabbis are discussing theology there are always at least five theological opinions on the floor." After my own course in rabbinics I was convinced it's impossible to flunk a true/false exam on the subject. No matter the "correct" answer, you can always surface a rabbi who holds the opposite opinion.

Since Semites, not Greeks, wrote and passed on our gospels, we have four of them, not one.

For instance, this year on Palm Sunday we'll hear Luke's unique take on the suffering Jesus. Unlike the other three evangelists, he constantly zeros in on Jesus' concern for others, giving us several passages we don't find in Mark, Matthew and John. He's not content just to show the impact of Jesus' suffering and death on himself, but he also stresses Jesus' concern for how his pain affects others.

Only Luke's Jesus heals the ear of the high priest's arresting servant, makes eye contact with Peter after his denial, comforts the women mourning his impending crucifixion along the road to Golgotha, and assures the "good" thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Though scholars debate whether the famous line, "Father, forgive them they know not what they do," was originally in Luke's gospel or is a latter addition, it's significant that if the latter, the guilty scribe added it to Luke's gospel and not to one of the other three. It's the only gospel in which it fits. (As Fiddler on the Roof's Tevye would say, "If it isn't in there, it should be!")

Luke's theology was certainly triggered by Paul's advice to the Philippians, "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus." (Why these words were left out of the Apostle's introduction to today's liturgical passage blows my mind.) Acquiring Jesus' unique mentality is the goal of all his followers. Why else would the Christian Scriptures been written and saved? If our mindset isn't his/her mindset, how can we dare call ourselves other Christs? The emptying of ourselves – as it was for Jesus - is an ongoing process. It doesn't stop until we experience our own resurrections.

Deutero-Isaiah tells us exactly how we're to empty ourselves: by listening for Yahweh's word every morning, even before our feet hit the floor. Carrol Stuhlmueller always stressed there's no better biblical definition of a disciple. God's always talking, but only those who make an effort to listen actually hear his/her voice.

As I mentioned above, there's no one way to listen or one group to whom we're to listen. Carrol once mentioned that if he told me who God's prophets are for him and his list got around, he'd never be permitted in another Catholic pulpit the rest of his life.

Afraid he took his list to eternity with him.

## APRIL 18<sup>TH</sup>, 2019: EUCHARIST OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 I Corinthians 11:23-26 John 13:1-15

Our ancestors in the faith could never have understood why so few of us participate in tonight's liturgy. It was one of the highlights of their liturgical year. So many longed to take part in tonight's celebration that the community's penitents who had completed their years of penance were usually absolved on Holy Thursday morning so they could once again join in tonight's festivities. (They were forbidden to participate in the Eucharist while they were still completing their penances.)

It's not only on this night that we have so few Eucharistic participants. We've experienced similar drop-offs in all our weekend parish celebrations. Church after church constantly cuts back on the number of its Eucharists. The diminished numbers can't be blamed solely on the ongoing priest shortage. In a great part, this appalling situation comes from the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Tonight's second and third readings tell us this has been a problem from Christianity's earliest days. In both passages, Paul and John are concerned with the community's "freeloaders" who refuse to die with Jesus during the celebration.

Biblical references to the Breaking of Bread have nothing to do with a special person saying special words over unleavened bread and grape wine. From the disciples sharing their bread with the crowd to Jesus' last meal with his followers, whenever the Eucharist biblically comes up or is referred to – except for John 6 – the sacred author's message always revolves around giving yourself or what belongs to you to others.

The second half of I Corinthians 11 is triggered by some of the wealthy in the local church refusing to share their Eucharistic food and drink with the poor. Through various gimmicks, they avoid taking part in the early celebrations' potluck format. That's why Paul reminds his readers that the original reason they "ate this bread and drank this cup" was "to proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." They weren't there to "get graces" by receiving communion or to fulfill a church regulation to "go to Sunday Mass." Their presence at the Eucharist was to somehow show their determination to die with Jesus. One way the Corinthians demonstrated this determination was to share their food and drink with those who had nothing. Only when they died by recognizing the risen Jesus in all around them, did the risen Jesus also become present in the bread and wine.

John, on the other hand, experiences that same death in the community's service to one another. In their culture, nothing demonstrated their giving better than washing one another's feet. Such a demeaning action was usually a job for slaves. No wonder Peter, the leader of the apostolic community, initially refuses to take part in such a ritual. It's far below his dignity. (A friend once pointed out that it's neigh on impossible to wash someone's feet while you're standing on a pedestal.) The gospel Jesus is basically telling Simon, "It's my way or the highway!" There are no limits to how far we'll go in giving ourselves to others.

Obviously we've got to change this ridiculous new translation that's been foisted on us. (Even Pope Francis agrees!) And we must acquaint ourselves with the history of the Eucharistic celebration. Once we do we'll see how absurd it is to ring bells during the celebration or zero in on the elevation. But more than anything, we again must find ways to give ourselves to one another during the Lord's Supper. We should die in more ways than just suffering through meaningless rituals. Once we surface and implement meaningful ways to give ourselves, I presume we'll again have to worry about turning people away from our Eucharistic celebrations, not attracting individuals to them.

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