

Monastic Scribe XLVIII: March 31, 2023

A LOVE STORY

What comes to your mind and heart when you realize it is Holy Week and Easter again? Do your memories of these times evoke guilt, feeling you are responsible for Jesus' death? Or do you blame the Jews? Be honest and admit what comes up. You won't be alone among Christians.

The Black Plague and the Dark Ages both helped to contribute a negative attitude to so much of what we believe. In more recent centuries, the Catholic Church's reaction to the Protestant Reformation and then to the French Revolution and its spawning of so much anti-Catholic sentiments have contributed to these negative spiritual tendencies.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) redirected us to the liturgy and scripture and older understandings of what it reminds us is the "paschal mystery," which means the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ all as one unit. One of the recurring refrains that we hear, beginning on Palm Sunday, is the verse from Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:6-11). It tells us that Jesus Christ, though God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself... he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. These verses may be the oldest words in the New Testament. The letter to the Philippians was written sometime in the fifties but this verse seems to be a quoted liturgical hymn that goes back even earlier.

What does "emptying" (kenosis) mean? First of all we understand that it is what the Triune God does. In the Trinity each relationship empties the Godself into the other two and this goes on eternally.

Self-emptying is the heart of God. It is what we mean by love. Yes, love must ultimately mean the letting go of one's self-centeredness and learning to live for another.

Thus Jesus emptied himself. He is the sacrament of the Triune God and shows us what God is, what love means. It is complete self-giving. In his suffering, death and resurrection he completely associates with God's creation and is the power of love. God has identified with God's creation out of love.

Monastic Scribe XLVIII: March 31, 2023

Here's the catch. We don't seem to be able to be real lovers without some suffering in our lives. We must overcome our selfishness and learn to give ourselves to others. When we first fall in love with another, we feel that the other fulfills us and makes our life happy and complete. This is the beginning of love. Unless we learn to give ourselves and lay down our lives for another, we will never be the creature beloved by God and embraced with the very life of God.

I see this happening every day and I feel the presence of God's love right before my eyes. When parents pour out themselves for their children, there is self-emptying. When spouses give of themselves to each other, particularly when one becomes needy and diminished, there is self-emptying. When grown children take care of their elderly parents, there is kenosis. When a friend lays down his or her life for another, there is a kenosis. When maturity of spirit leads a person to embrace an occupation that is life-threatening, such as the military, police, firefighters, first responders, doctors and nurses, there is kenosis. And this never stops. A sense of the purpose of life leads even many seniors to keep giving, even in small and voluntary ways, rather than settle down for a comfortable and easy life. It is what we are made for.

Saint John of the Cross taught that at the end of our lives we will be judged by only one thing and that is whether we have learned to love.

It takes a lifetime to really know how to love for we are following God who is Love itself. It can't be done for us. We must learn to give of ourselves. Yes, we will make mistakes along the way and these seem necessary for us to get love out of our heads and into our hearts. Did you know that, at the Easter Vigil each year, the great hymn which is called the Exultet, cries out "O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam."

And, thus, Jesus is so important for us these days. He is the sacrament of the God who is love. He associates with every aspect of human life and thereby makes it holy and loving. His suffering and death are not only for us but with us. Holy Week and Easter are celebrations of love. Every day of these holy days shows us the way to love. We marvel at God's love who has poured out the God-self for us so that we might learn to pour out ourselves for one another. This is not a time for being consumed by guilt which is so often another form of self-centeredness. God loves us no matter what, even when we are selfish and afraid to love. When we finally

Monastic Scribe XLVIII: March 31, 2023

can really know and feel this love for us, we can afford to really love God and all others and all of God's creation in the same way that God loves. Repentance and conversion follow love and are not the way to earn it.

A blessed Holy Week and a Happy Easter to you from yours truly at:

joycet@glastonburyabbey.org Alleluia! Alleluia!

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.