

Alone but not Forsaken

By: Fr. Joseph Pellegrino

And so it begins...

It begins with a meal.

It continues with abandonment.

It concludes with the Lord crying out the words of Psalm 22: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The Passion in the Gospel of Mark teaches us that following Christ means following the One who was abandoned by all who would not accept His cross.

It all begins with a meal. During this meal that we call the Last Supper, Jesus presents bread and wine and transforms them into the Body and Blood of the New Covenant. We have heard a lot about covenants this Lent. There was the covenant with Noah, stating that God would not give up on his people. There was the covenant with Abraham, the covenant of faith, stating that God supports us through our struggles in faith. There was the covenant with Moses, the covenant of the Ten Commandments, telling us that God would give us the way to live his life. There was the covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, the New Covenant of a new law that would be written in the hearts of the people. Now, at the Last Supper and at every Mass, we receive the New Covenant of the Body and Blood of the Lord. By receiving this covenant, we accept our sharing in the sacrificial love of the Lord. By receiving communion we agree to join the Lord in giving ourselves over to the eternal love of his Father.

The disciples were not ready to accept the New Covenant that first Holy Week. One by one they abandoned Jesus. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. None of the others are accounted for in this Gospel except a few women looking on from a distance. Even the crowd that had been so enthusiastic when they witnessed Jesus' miracles had abandoned him. They preferred a violent rebel, Barsabbas, rather than the Prince of Peace. One courageous member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, risked his reputation to bury Jesus with dignity. He was quite alone.

They all abandoned Jesus. Did even his Father abandon him? Perhaps, this might appear to have happened if we only focus on the first words of Psalm 22 that Jesus began praying from the cross. But this cry of the faithful child of God in pain ends with God coming and defending his loved one. Jesus dies abandoned, but not alone.

Listen to the words of Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish?

My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night but I have no relief.

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the glory of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted and you rescued them. To you they cried out and they escaped; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

But I am a worm, hardly human, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer; they shake their heads at me: "You relied on the LORD--let him deliver you; if he loves you, let him rescue you."

Yet you drew me forth from the womb, made me safe at my mother's breast. Upon you I was thrust from the womb; since birth you are my God.

Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; fierce bulls of Bashan encircle me. They open their mouths against me, lions that rend and roar. Like water my life drains away; all my bones grow soft. My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me. As dry as a potsherd is my throat; my tongue sticks to my palate; you lay me in the dust of death.

Many dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers closes in on me. So wasted are my hands and feet that I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, LORD, do not stay far off; my strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my forlorn life from the teeth of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth, my poor life from the horns of wild bulls.

Then I will proclaim your name to the assembly; in the community I will praise you: "You who fear the LORD, give praise! All descendants of Jacob, give honor; show reverence, all descendants of Israel!"

For God has not spurned or disdained the misery of this poor wretch, Did not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out.

I will offer praise in the great assembly; my vows I will fulfill before those who fear him.

The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the LORD will offer praise. May your hearts enjoy life forever!"

All the ends of the earth will worship and turn to the LORD; All the families of nations will bow low before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, the ruler over the nations. All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; All who have gone down into the dust will kneel in homage.

And I will live for the LORD; my descendants will serve you. The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought.

We pray today that we might be among those who accept the cross, the Lord's cross and our crosses. May we be among those who proclaim the deliverance of God to every generation.

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READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 50:3-7 Philippians 2:6-11 Mark 14:1-15

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苦 難 的 奧 秘

當然，從今日的遊行禮儀，我們可體會人性的反覆。首先是聖枝遊行，群眾手執樹枝，高呼「達味之子萬歲」，夾道歡迎耶穌進入耶路撒冷聖京。接著，便是聆聽馬爾谷福音的耶穌受難始末，既殘暴又充滿血腥。試想想：同一群人曾高呼過「賀三納」，歡迎過耶穌，現在又狂喊「釘死祂」。人性可以是這麼反覆，真值得我們引以為鑑。

但是，今天彌撒中的所有禮儀讀經卻是以耶穌受難為主題，包括：選自馬爾谷福音的耶穌受難史；強調耶穌服從至死、且死在十字架上的斐理伯宣言；以及描寫上主僕人甘受苦難的依撒意亞先知書讚歌。因此，我們今天最宜反思一下苦難的奧秘。

翻開 <<聖經神學辭典>>，我們不難看到在舊約中，一般以色列民都以平常心看待痛苦，視痛苦為本不應有的災禍（約十四 1）；健康卻是天主的恩賜（德卅四 20）。事實很多聖詠是病人祈求痊癒的禱詞（詠 6:38; 41:88）。以色列民雖然了解痛苦可能是由於自然原因發生，亦承認原罪是世界的根源，卻仍堅決一神論，主張連痛苦也逃不出天主的掌握：「我造了光明，造了黑暗，造了幸福，降下災禍。」（依四五 7）因此，無論苦難如何嚴重，以色列民總沒有變成悲觀主義者；反之，卻能看到苦難的奧義。他們以信德作支柱，漸漸發現，痛苦能產生淨化價值，猶如火能煉淨金屬雜質般（耶九 6）。痛苦能產生教育功效，像慈父糾正兒女般（申八 5；箴三 11）。以色列民還能看到痛苦是出於天主的慈愛（加下六 12-17），保留給祂所引以為榮的僕人們，比如：亞巴郎（創廿二）、約伯（約一 11; 二 5）及多俾亞（多十二 13）等。今天第一篇讀經，即依撒意亞先知書，更進一步預言，「天主的僕人」。雖是無辜的，卻「犧牲了性命，作了贖罪祭」（依五三 10），為使後輩延年益壽。

在新約聖經中，耶穌就是這位「受苦的僕人的化身。祂以慈心關懷人類痛苦（瑪九 36；十四 14；十五 32），以治病及使人復生戰勝痛苦（瑪十一 4），更透過服從與犧牲提昇痛苦（瑪二十 28；宗三 7），使之產生救贖功效。因此，耶穌邀請門徒背起自己的十字架，跟隨祂，且以堅忍的心奔跑全程，目不轉睛地注視著祂。（希十二 1）。耶穌亦許下，我們作祂的門徒的，「如果與祂一同受苦」，將來定必「與祂一同享光榮」（羅八 17）。這就是今天我們開始進入逾越慶典的理由。

談到苦難的淨化價值及教育功效，我不期然想起了台灣高文煉所著 <<深度人生>> 一書所提及的一個故事：新加坡李光耀伉儷每次到訪台灣，其夫人總會請宋楚瑜先生幫忙買一些台灣蜂蜜。剛開始宋先生很好奇，新加坡也有蜂蜜，難道台灣的蜂蜜品質比較好？經過詢問之後才知道，原來新加坡四季如春，沒有寒冬，那裡的蜜蜂不釀蜜。當地的農地專家從國外引進優良品種，但是結果無效，連原先引進的優良品種也不釀蜜了。因為四季如春，天天有花可採，根本不必釀蜜儲存。人生不也是如此嗎？只有經過逆境和痛苦的人，才會在成長中變得堅強。

教宗聖若望保祿二世 <<生命的福音>> 通諭，則把今天福音中耶穌受難的救贖價值發揮得淋漓盡致。他說：「耶穌被釘十字架，又被高舉起來。祂經歷了祂最「無能為力」的時刻，祂的生命似乎成為對手的笑柄，也完全落入劊子手的手中……祂遭人揶揄嘲弄，受人侮辱（谷十五 24-36）。然而就在這些屈辱當中，一個羅馬百夫長看到了祂這樣斷氣，而歎道：「這人真是天主子！」（谷十五 39）因此就在祂最軟弱的時候，天主子顯示了自己的身份：祂在十字架上顯示了祂的光榮。

事實，教宗聖若望保祿二世本人九歲喪母，十三歲喪兄，廿一歲又失去唯一的親人老父。且他生逢戰亂，十九歲時，祖國遭受德國納粹鐵蹄蹂躪，等到擺脫納粹鐵蹄，又在蘇聯及波共獨裁恐怖政權下生活了三十多年。但他卻能透過祈禱和對主的信心，把坎坷的身世和國難化為力量，走上獻身事主愛人的道路，成為全球尊敬的傑出領袖。這就是化苦難為祝福的好例證。 摘自「公教報」