

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

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I. Saint Paul of the Cross (1694-1775)

- The Memoria Passionis as an enduring gift and call in the life of Paul of the Cross
- Paul's positive image of God – Francis de Sales (1567-1622) – God as “the sovereign and infinite Good” – a sea of infinite charity
- “God is a Father, and a most loving Father, who would sooner let sky and earth perish than a person who trusts in him” (1751)
- The “sea of the most holy passion” – the greatest and most stupendous work of God's saving love
- Contemplation of the passion of Jesus as “the door through which the soul enters into union with God, to deep recollection and to true contemplation” (Bialas, 84) -- Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)
- The memory of the passion as a motive and vehicle of conversion
- Discerning God's will – Gethsemane – “Don't doubt but that God keeps you in his divine arms and that the time will come when he will teach you his most holy will” (Bialas, 57-58)

II. Passionist Constitutions

- “Keenly aware of the evils that afflicted the people of his time, he [Paul of the Cross] never tired of insisting that the most effective remedy is the passion of Jesus, ‘the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love.’” (*Constitutions*, 1)
- “We are aware that the passion of Christ continues in this world until he comes in glory; therefore, we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries as we journey through life toward the Father.” (3)
- “The power of the cross, which is the wisdom of God, gives us strength to discern and remove the causes of human suffering. For this reason, our mission aims at evangelizing others by means of the word of the cross.” (3)

- His [Jesus'] passion reveals the power of God which penetrates the world, destroying the power of evil and building up the kingdom of God." (5)

- "We express our participation in the passion by a special vow, which is at once personal, communitarian and apostolic. Through this vow we bind ourselves to keep alive the memory of the passion of Christ." (6)

III. Themes in Contemporary Theology

A. The Cross and the Reign of God

– Connecting Jesus' passion and death with his public ministry of proclaiming the Reign (Kingdom) of God – the ambiguity of "sacrifice" language –

E. Schillebeeckx: the "barbarous excess of suffering in our world" – The Reign of God is "the saving presence of God, active and encouraging, as it is affirmed or welcomed among men and women" – The death of Jesus is "the intrinsic historical consequence of the radicalism of both his message and his lifestyle" – When the Reign of God became present in Jesus' ministry, people experienced *life*

- Jon Sobrino, SJ

B. Solidarity and the Dangerous Memory of the Passion

Pope Francis: "The word 'solidarity' is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few." (EG 188) – "Solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them" (EG 189)

- Solidarity applied to the *Incarnation* and the *Cross*

- E. Johnson – The incarnation entails "God's plunging into human history and transforming it from within." (*She Who Is*, 153)

- The cross of Jesus – God as a participant in the pain of the world – Jesus' death on the cross signifies and effects God's solidarity with the suffering people of all time

- "The cross signifies that God, who is love, whose will stands in contrast to such misery, nevertheless freely plunges into the midst of the pain and tastes its bitterness to the bitter end in order to save." (Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 59)

- Schillebeeckx: “On the cross Jesus shared in the brokenness of our world. This means that God determines in absolute freedom, down the ages, who and how he wills to be in his deepest identity, namely a God of men and women, an ally in our suffering and absurdity, and also an ally in the good that we do. In his own being he is a God for us.” (*Church*, 126)

- Memory, narrative, solidarity
- J.B. Metz – the “dangerous memory” of the passion

C. The Power of Lament

– Elie Wiesel: *Night*

– “The world of lament speech thus is based on the premise that the speech of Israel draws God into the trouble. God will act and life will be restored” (W. Brueggemann) – “There is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate – everything belongs to this conversation of the heart . . .” – “. . . precisely in such deathly places as presented in these psalms new life is given by God” (Brueggemann)

– P. Zylla on the movement from silence (mutism) to lament – “the word-slain existence of the most afflicted” – laments as expressions of a “bruised faith”

– Lament in the letters of Paul of the Cross

- Don Senior on Gethsemane: “The evangelist (Mark) presents Jesus as an example of biblical faith, a tormented child of God in love with life and fearful of death. . . . The raw honesty and stunning humanness of such a prayer is totally within the great tradition of the Jewish lament”

For Reflection

-- What does the memory of the Passion of Jesus mean to you? How does it influence your prayer? What impact does it have on your life and ministry?