

THE TRIDUUM -----IN GENERAL

Dear Preachers:

As I look upon the readings for these days, I have some general thoughts that might be useful for any of the preachings we do from Thursday to Easter Sunday. I was advised once not to think of these days as separate events but to keep their unity in mind. You cannot think of one of these days out of the context of the other two. So, Good Friday needs also to be seen in the light of Easter; Easter has to be faced in light of Good Friday. You hold the pain and death while mindful of the new life of Easter; you celebrate the new life of Easter mindful of what it came out of--the death of Good Friday.

I also enter these days reminded that I am not pretending to be “there when they crucified my Lord.” These events we celebrate are present tense, not some ancient happening. God is either healing our wounds, giving us bread for our journey and overcoming death or God is doing nothing at all for us. We are looking not for a return from the dead-on Jesus’ part; but for someone to roll away the stone and open a whole new way of life for us. We don’t need a past hero, but someone to open up the present and future for us; to show us possibilities now and into our future. On our own, facing our deaths and struggles, we see no path, no sense to what we experience. But if the stone were rolled back we might see new life and transformation possible for us.

Good Friday forces us to stare death in the face and keeps us from jumping too quickly ahead to a giddy celebration of Easter. We are not involved in some biological or natural process here; the way we wait through a hard winter with crust frozen soil, knowing, as day follows night, that there will be Spring. We are sure flowers will bloom soon; indeed they have already begun to do that. But their flowering and the new shoots breaking through the earth, are not “proofs” of a resurrection awaiting us all. Nature might make a good example when we want to make the Resurrection “reasonable,” “expected,” almost “logical.” But note that in the Southern Hemisphere, Easter comes in Fall, the dying season. Maybe Good Friday and Autumn make better partners.

What’s clear in the narratives is that a human died. That’s supposed to be the last word; he is dead. He is the son of Mary and like so many other mothers, she has seen her son die. This day links us with so many parents who have lost their children to violence. It also is a day to think about preaching against the death penalty. Mary is not expecting him to return in the Springtime with the flowers.

Good Friday says, “that’s that.”

Easter is more than flowers catching us by surprise. They may present a good metaphor, but we expect them, we don’t have a basis to expect the Resurrection. Metaphors pale in the light of what God did; God did something much more. We take death seriously so that we can be completely surprised by Easter. Sunday will require that we see everything completely differently. Now, Resurrection is the lens through which we see everything. Nothing really quite matches what Resurrection really is and we take its surprise to our daily lives as we face death in all its forms. When we are confronted by the dyings, we should not gloss over them as if they were easily overcome. Good Friday requires us to take these deaths seriously, they are beyond our power to triumph and when new life comes and a way through opens, we know they have their origins in a more powerful source than ourselves.

We sit at the Vigil Service having suffered the violence of Jesus’ death and all the other deaths and endings we have endured. We vigil, realizing how weakened we are by death and the corrupting forces in our lives. As we vigil we wait to hear the Easter announcement of Mark’s Gospel (Mark 16: 1-8) and we recall a promise we heard at the beginning of this same Gospel when John the Baptist promised us, “one more powerful than I is to come....” That’s what we wait for...the news of this powerful one’s arrival. In the Gospel he showed his power through miracles and the authority of his teaching. Will he be even more for us? Will he have power even over death? We wait in the darkness of our vigil, as we listen to the ancient texts that re-tell the story of our deliverance in the past. Will we be delivered again, but this time finally delivered from the finality of death? A recent death in my own family once more raises the question, not as a speculative discussion, but as a matter of life or death, faith or despair.

Mark’s resurrection story is very enigmatic. It was originally the end of the Gospel, “because of their great fear they said nothing.” The following verses, with clearer assurances seem to have been added later to make up for the absence of Resurrection appearances in the original ending. The message of the young man in white to the three women is worth a reflection.

One commentator (Edgar Krentz) notes that the description given Jesus by the messenger, “Jesus of Nazareth, the one crucified,” contained double insult terms. “Nazarene” linked with “crucified” describe Jesus as “crude, unlettered, small town, rejected and humiliated with a criminal’s death.” Well, so much for the “more powerful One”! Except these terms of opprobrium are now linked with

resurrection! The rejected and crucified one is resurrected, the messenger tells us. We are left with that pronouncement to our bewildered lives. We too, who experience the crushing power of death and who feel rejected and set aside by an easy swipe of its powerful paw are hearers of this startling and unexpected news. There is hope for us.

The command is to go to Galilee if we want to see him. What could that mean? Galilee is where it all started and where he taught and performed his miracles, amid the outcasts in the backwater of the Jewish community. The passage ends with the silence of the women. How long will they stay “bewildered and trembling?” Remember that this Gospel is written to persecuted community during the Jewish-Roman War of 66-7-AD. If the community kept quiet and kept its collective head down, they might get through the persecution. But this Gospel calls for confession, calls us to lose our lives, “for my sake and for the Gospel” (10:29). Mark’s Gospel reminds us that persecution, and the proclamation of the Gospel are linked. So, at this point of the story we are called to go to Galilee, rethink Jesus’s teaching and proclamation and, on that basis, decide to follow or reject his life.

What’s the cost for us to live the Gospel’s call in our lives? What are the costs in our modern culture of living the consequences of his teaching? Jesus went “ahead of you to Galilee.” Maybe recalling his life and words there will help us discover him resurrected in our lives, giving new life to those overpowered by death and its consequential fear and withdrawal. Easter time may be a good time to reread the Gospel accounts in the light of the resurrection and discover their possibilities for our lives. Maybe in Galilee we will encounter “one more powerful.”

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

“The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum” by Gabe Huck.
(Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1981)

This is a gem of a resource for the Triduum. Good for planners of the liturgy with suggestions drawn from parish experience. Gives a wealth of information on the liturgy of these days and an overview of how the days form a unit.

QUOTABLE

“No season seems so hard to maintain as Eastertime. Perhaps its character will be rediscovered as the presence of a catechumenate is felt in the parish community, as Lent becomes a parish-wide season of renewal and the Easter Triduum as

experience of Christ's Passover. The we can seek the musical and visual and verbal signs for these fifty days of great peace and joy.
—from, "The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum" by Gabe Huck, page 92.

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Thank you.

"Blessings on your preaching",

Jude Siciliano, OP

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