

Taking Time for Prayer and Reflection

A Retreat at Home during Holy Week

Some might consider Holy Week as the best time for a Retreat, because of what we celebrate. Often we pray : "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again." On this is our faith based. Can I take some time during this week to stop from my normal activities, find a quiet place, seek quiet within, and reflect upon the story of this week. I first become aware of my own being, my own breathing, as I seek to be aware of God's presence with me. The following may assist in my prayer and reflection. Take what is helpful. Stay wherever your God seems to speak to you. Come back to what may have been significant for you. Above all, be with your God. Stop! Listen! Respond! Live!

5. "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

"One of the criminals hanging there abused him: 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He answered, 'In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Luke 23:39-43)

Luke's account of Jesus' Passion is like a disciple living over again with great tenderness the story of his Master. Luke seems to emphasise the human greatness, the non-violence, the generous spirit, the forgiveness and filial abandonment of him whom Pilate has declared innocent. There is also a most urgent appeal to the reader to share in the passion of Christ with the proper dispositions.

"In truth I tell you, ..."

Throughout his Gospel Luke has taken every opportunity to dwell on Jesus as one who reaches out to the outcasts and sinners. This scene, then, forms a beautiful climax just before Jesus' death. His last relationship is with one who is being executed as a criminal. Jesus welcomes him with love.

Jesus declared that he has been sent by God, anointed "to bring good news to the afflicted. ... to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, 'to let the oppressed go free, ..." (Luke 4:18) We have witnessed his great love and compassion. Many either approached him in their need or were led to faith in him because of his great love for them. He forgave sinners, gave sight to the blind, enabled the lame to walk, and even raised the dead to life. He was there before them as one sent by God, speaking a message of truth, of life, and of love. He IS the Way, the Truth and the Life. Many refused to believe in him, but those who were open to his presence and his word, discovered in him a loving heart that offered acceptance, forgiveness, healing and the

freedom to move beyond where they were, transformed by a love that conquers sin and death. 'In truth I tell you, ...'

What lesson is there for me in this scene? What is Jesus like for this criminal? What has led him to this act of faith and this humble request - 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'? Some of Jesus' own disciples looked for special places in the kingdom; this man simply asked that he be remembered..

'Whom are you seeking? What are you looking for?'

What is my desire, my request of Jesus at this time? What do I ask of him? How confident am I in asking for what I desire, for what I need? Who is he for me that I would place my needs, my desires before him?

""...today you will be with me in paradise.""

Even in the midst of his suffering, Jesus is able to show that same compassion and love that many others experienced during his public ministry. Have I experienced something of this same love that I can approach him now with faith and hope? How do I show this love of God to others, how do I show forth this same compassion? Am I accepting of others, no matter what I might be struggling with or suffering, and no matter what might be their situation, their beliefs or attitudes? If I were facing death, would I be honest and humble enough to make a similar request of Jesus? How confident would I be of receiving a similar response? What would be my request of him now? : ---"Lord, increase my faith, ... Lord, that I might see, that I be forgiven, be healed, be strengthened, be faithful ... that I might be free ...to serve you in others, to love as you love"

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES FOR PRAYER:

Rom 8:28-39 ... God works with those who love him ... and turns everything to their good ... neither death nor life ... nor any created thing ... will ever come between us and the love of God ...

Lk 15:11-32 ... (Jesus said) 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him.'

Ezek 34:11-16 ... the Lord ...says this: Look, I myself shall take care of my flock ...I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the injured ... be a true shepherd to them.

Ps 103:13-22 ... As tenderly as a father treats his children, so Yahweh treats those who fear him ... (his) faithful love ... is from eternity and for ever.

Gal 4:1-7 ... God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying, 'Abba, Father'; and so you are no longer a slave, but ... an heir.

A REFLECTION AT THE END OF THIS TIME OF PRAYER:

What have been the graces of this time of retreat? What do I thank God for as I reflect upon this time with God? Have I received something of what I asked for? Have I deepened my relationship with God, with Jesus during these days? Can I renew my commitment to my God and to God's call to me to be a disciple of Jesus, a servant of God's people? How can I enable the gifts and graces received from God at this time to bear fruit in the days ahead? What do I ask of my God as I move from these days back to the people and the events of my daily living?