

Dear Friends and Visitors

A late Easter meant a splendid display of dogwoods during the Paschal Triduum and on the Day of Resurrection. Our Holy Week liturgies were for the monks and our guests truly a part-taking in the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord. We were delighted that our Franciscan neighbors of Our Lady of the Angels Friary joined us for all the Triduum liturgies, and contributed their singing and instrumental talents to our Vigil liturgy. Several of our guests took part in the liturgy as readers.

At lauds and Vespers during the Easter season we are using the ancient hymns *Ad ceonam Agni providi* and *Aurora caelum purpurat* with their traditional melodies, along with a variety of "Alleluia" chants from the Cistercian repertoire. The Paschal candle dominates the sanctuary in its unadorned honey-white simplicity, and a succession of Ozarks wild flowers and blossoming trees provides color and fragrance in our lovely little church.

A close friend of the Abbey, usually present for Holy Week, missed her visit this year, as we missed her. She wrote, though, the following. Though not present physically, she was in the Spirit. Clearly, the Spirit supplied what her physical presence deprived her of.

Throughout the week I will envision the Ozark mountain beauty of dogwoods and redbud trees in full bloom; the Mass of the Lord's Supper and the procession to the Altar of Repose with the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday; the flaming red vestment and prayers of intercession for the whole world on Good Friday; the stark emptiness of Holy Saturday; the image of white-robed monks and guests gathered under the stars around the New Fire to begin the Easter Vigil; the sounds of whippoorwills in the distance and of the bells breaking their silence at the Gloria, with Alleluias soon to follow as the Word is proclaimed -- that Jesus Christ is Risen! For our reader's further nourishment we offer also the homily delivered by Abbot Mark on Passion Sunday, a homily suitable for the entire Paschal time and beyond.

In our monastic ritual, when we come to the part of the Passion Narrative on Palm Sunday and on Good Friday when Jesus finally expires, the monks all suddenly hit the floor, face down prostrate. We stay like that for some little while before getting up and letting the readers finish the account with the deposition and the burial.

I am sure this practice is meant to be a gesture of reverence at the death of the Lord. But it always strikes me too as the most appropriate response to the non-sense of everything we had just heard – how in really short order all systems conspired against all reason and fellow-feeling to put a very good and a very innocent man to death. It is enough to knock you over in

bewilderment. How did that happen?!

Really, the Passion of Jesus doesn't make any sense without the Last Supper that precedes it. There, Jesus, in all peace and security, explains graphically what the meaning of the next day is. St Paul spends all kinds of time trying to explain the Passion theologically, and maybe St John does the best job when he says, simply, "God loved the world so much..." But try to find any reason for Christ's death in the narrative itself, in the reasoning of the people involved, in the evidence and in truth, and you can only fall on your face in despair at finding none at all.

But maybe St Mark's version gives us a good reason for the death of Jesus, from a purely human point of view. St Mark says, "Pilate knew that it was because of jealousy that the chief priests handed Jesus over (15:10)." Jealousy might be a key to why they, why we, killed Jesus.

Jealousy is desire gone crooked. Here's how it works. I admire you or something about you – your sense of humor, your freedom, your intelligence, your talent. You have this quality. In addition, you have this woman or this job, too. Because I admire you, I desire that quality of yours, or that woman or that job, too, not simply because the quality itself or the woman herself is desirable, but because you have them and I want to be like you. I want to be what you are, so I want to have what you have.

In this understanding of things, desire is relational. In a sense, desire is contagious. I catch my desire from the person I stand in admiration of, from you. If you think of your own experience, you will see that one of two things can happen. I will either take the other person as a model for imitation, or I will become jealous of him or her. It is when desire turns to jealousy and envy that it becomes a source of suffering. When desire turns to jealousy and rivalry, then the other person ceases to be for me a model for healthy imitation. Instead, he is seen as a stumbling block and an obstacle and so someone to be done away with. Then, desire becomes the mother of violence.

In chapter two of 1st Corinthians, St Paul asserts that the wisdom of God is the Crucified Jesus. That is, the victim of human jealousy and violence is divine wisdom. "We preach a crucified Christ, scandalous and foolish but nevertheless the wisdom of God" (1:23-24). Paul goes on to say that if the political rulers of the time had known this, they would not have crucified Jesus. The people who killed Jesus -- Pilate and the Jewish leaders -- did not know that in doing that deed of violence, they would be unleashing into the world the full force of God's wisdom; they would be dissolving the wisdom of the world that operates from competition, fear, jealous and revenge. The rulers of this age did not know that in killing Jesus, they would be putting an end to their own power base and so opening the way to their own conversion.

The rulers of this age killed the Lord of glory because they envied him. They desired to be and to have what Jesus was and had, but were unable to pay the price to get it, so their desire passed up the road of imitation and chose instead to go down the path of jealousy and revenge. Instead of seeing Jesus as a model to imitate, they made him into an obstacle to eliminate.

What did Jesus have that was so desirable, yet so threatening that he had to be gotten rid of? Jesus had freedom. Jesus was not controlled by compulsions or emotions. He was not controlled by human respect or the urge to get revenge. He knew he was the beloved Son of God. He knew himself. As he said to Pilate, "I Am."

From both a human perspective, and a trinitarian one, Jesus' freedom was a fruit of his own desire. For Jesus, desire was completely a matter of imitation. Jesus' desire was entirely focused on doing the will of his Father in heaven. Jesus imitated God without envying him: he did not consider his equality with God as something to be flaunted, but he emptied himself, becoming a slave: "Not what I want, but what you want...Abba, Father." He was completely at ease with himself and at home in the world, and because of his flagrant happiness and freedom, the world was uneasy about Jesus. The rulers of this age who killed Jesus killed him because they desired his freedom but were unable to pay the price of imitation that would allow them to have it. Therefore, their desire turned to jealousy and jealousy ended in violence.

The irony is that in their violent deed, of the hidden Wisdom of God was brought out into the open, and the crucified Jesus of Nazareth became the Lord of glory. "Truly, this was the Son of God."

What does it mean, then, Jesus' word to us, "whoever does not take up his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple?" Following Jesus is the desire of imitation. Imitation of Jesus is the streetcar named Desire that, in this case, takes us to the freedom on every level. Taking up our own cross means to be ready to suffer the blows and spitting of people who will want our happiness but will resent the price they have to pay. A recovering alcoholic is told by a former drinking buddy, "if you're too good to drink with me anymore, then adios, amigo."

The Passion Narrative according to Mark, which we read this Passion Sunday, begins with an anonymous woman pouring oil over Jesus' head. It ends with two identified women who keep gazing at the place Jesus' body was laid. The anonymous woman and the named women were disciples. Also, each in her own way carried her cross, the cross of her freedom. Before Jesus underwent his trial and poured out his blood, the anonymous woman poured out her ointment and underwent the trial of derision, belittlement and dismissal. And after the Twelve and the

rest had denied and dispersed in fear and shame and naked, the two Marys stay and watch and watch, his death and Cross, and their own as his followers. In both cases, there is the desire of imitation, the desire of admiration, the desire that pours out rather than guzzles down. This is the mind of Christ. It is the way religion is the way to peace.

Fr Mark, Abbot