

From Fr. Yake's Desk – A Reflection on the Paschal Mystery

Instalment #5

A reality that dominates our lives is 'time.' In the satirical comedy film, *Beat the Devil*, (1954) the issue of time is casually raised and the Peter Lorre character, Mr. O'Hara, asks, "What is time?" Then he answers, "The Swiss manufacture it, French horde it, Italians squander it, Americans say it is money, English say it does not exist.... I say it is a crook." His list of definitions invites viewers to answer for themselves: What is time? Although watches and calendars often dominate our consciousness have we thought, not about what time it is, but what is time? It is an important question because *tempus fugit*, 'time flies,' 'time's a-fleeting;' we all have only so much time and we do not know how much so how we view the question is a significant issue. Scientists have suggested that the average human lifespan when compared with the life of planet earth is 8/10 of a second; the wisdom of the psalmist concurred imaging us as grass that blooms in the morning and withers in the evening. (Ps. 90: 6, Ps 103: 15) We all have heard the cliché, "Life is short," and finding ourselves in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ resolves the mystery of time's duration.

We need an answer to the question of time because we live our lives in time, totally consumed by past, present, and future. We can tend to evaluate ourselves as to how we use time: positive and negative events and relationships of the past, the current issues that concern us, and the ambitions and plans that drive us toward the future. Much of the suffering of boredom that isolation brings, time as 'a crook,' is that one or more parts of the three elements of time is either beyond our control or they are controlling us. For example, how many persons suffer today because of something that happened years ago, and this to jeopardize a happy future?

The last two instalments concerned two aspects of the Paschal Mystery of the Christ: Jesus' suffering (May 10) and death (May 17) that reveal the spirituality of the Messiah as a movement away from any priorities or attachments that can substitute for God. This presentation will evoke our imagination as it considers the resurrection of the Lord, the ultimate goal and revelation that the Messiah came to make available to us. By the gift of eternal life the resurrection of the Lord powerfully enabled time to cease to be a threat or a question but rather the means to make time what it is, an opportunity to engage timelessness on this side of eternity.

A simple answer about the time-eternity quandary can be found by considering the Church's conviction that, "The resurrection...is not a theory, but an historical reality revealed by the man Jesus Christ by means of his "Passover," his "passage," which has opened a "new way" between heaven and earth (cf. Heb. 10:20). It is neither a myth nor a dream, it is not a vision or a utopia, it is not a fairy tale, but it is a singular and unrepeatable event: Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, who at dusk on Friday was taken down from the Cross and buried, has victoriously left the tomb.... This the Church proclaims...with joy...and wishes to share with all people in every place." (Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI. *Holy Days: Meditations on the Feasts, Fasts, and Other Solemnities of the Church*. (Toronto: Novalis, 2012), p. 52-53 as found in, *Living With Christ*, Triduum, 2013, p. 127.)

In the Apostles' Creed Christians profess that they believe in, "the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting" and St. Paul saw our total existence as a matter of a decision to accept or reject the resurrection. We read, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we are also to live with him. We know that Christ, once raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no more power over him. His death was death to sin, once for all; his life is life for God. In the same way you must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 6: 8-11)

How might eternal life be conceptualized when all persons know is life bounded by limited time? One way by which this dilemma can be engaged is to meditate upon the resurrection appearances of Jesus that are found in the Acts of the Apostles. Note also five observations of Jesus' resurrected life from the gospels by scripture scholar Rev. David Stanley, SJ:

1. There is no nostalgia, i. e. references to the old way of being with Jesus *via* miracles, etc. because these are no longer necessary; he has passed on to a new realm of being. "Blessed are they who believe and have not seen."
2. Resurrection or Resuscitation; There were no eyewitnesses or description of the resurrection event. From Romans 6 persons die once and live the new life versus Lazarus and Jairus' daughter who would have to die again.
3. Two Characteristics of Resurrected Life:
 - a. There is no familiarizing with Jesus that disciples had when he was physically alive with them.
 - b. Jesus is presented as a totally free human being: going ahead to Galilee, entering rooms with closed windows and doors, etc.
4. Recognizing Jesus Risen: One needs the gift of faith to see Jesus.
5. Resurrection and the humanity of Jesus: He is always human even in the resurrection. We are meant to join the human Jesus and he tells his disciples that they will follow him because he wants them with him where he is.

Another approach is *via* how philosophy has engaged the issue, for example, Boethius' book, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. (trans. Richard Green. (The Bobbs-Merrill Co, Inc: Indianapolis, New York), 1962, that seriously addressed the notion of time and eternity with the best philosophical tools of his day.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480-524) was an erudite scholar and prolific author whose highly acclaimed books served as texts for medieval schools and whose influence on academia extended for a thousand years. He rose to the heights of political power becoming a Roman Consul and Master of the King's Offices, one of the highest positions in the Western Empire. Boethius lost his social status and wealth when he opposed the Arian-Christian, King Theodoric, by trying to re-establish doctrinal and ecclesiastical unity between Rome and Constantinople, the Empire in the East. (The Arian heresy, proposed by Arius (d. 336), held that Christ did not co-exist eternally with God and that he was neither truly God or truly man but was a created being. [The First Ecumenical Council held in Nicaea in 325 clarified the two natures in Christ, the hypostatic union.] The first centuries of the Christian experience focused on the person of Jesus Christ and led to defining Mary as the Mother of God {*Theotokos*} at the third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus in 431.) An interesting aside: Pope John I was

Theodoric's ambassador to an embassy with Emperor Justin. Theodoric was displeased with the result of the meeting and had Pope John arrested on his return to Rome where he died in prison probably of starvation in 526. Pope St. John I's feast day is May 18.

Awaiting execution, Boethius concerned himself with the fickle nature of life as he attempted to come to grips with his radical change of fortune. Some of the issues that he addressed in *The Consolation* were time, eternity, and how God knows. Of the latter he wrote, "...since God lives in the eternal present, His knowledge transcends all movement of time and abides in the simplicity of its immediate present. It encompasses the infinite sweep of past and future, and regards all things in its simple comprehension as if they were now taking place." (Note that St. Peter addressed this concern saying that for God a thousand years are as a day. See 2 Peter 3: 8) "Thus, if you think about the foreknowledge by which God distinguishes all things, you will rightly consider it to be not a foreknowledge of future events, but knowledge of a never changing present. For this reason, divine knowledge is called providence, rather than prevision, because it resides above all inferior things and looks out on all things from their summit." (p. 116) Of course, God's way of knowing does not cause events, for example, if a blind person is viewed from a rooftop walking towards a newly cemented part of the sidewalk the viewer knows what must happen but this knowledge does not cause the person stepping into the cement.

Boethius defined eternity: "Eternity is the whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life." (p. 115) From his wise insight we may better understand Jesus when he tells us, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10: 10) In eternity it is always now in reference to time, because chronological time does not exist but it is always "whole, perfect, ...endless," in terms of life. St. Irenaeus, the most important theologian of the second century, is believed to have authored the saying, "The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God." Full aliveness may be interpreted as our being eternally alive and seeing God directly as he is. Note that Jesus told Martha that he was the resurrection and the life; (John 11: 25, 11: 17-44) he did not infer that resurrection was a matter of time but a relationship with him.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) concurred by asserting that human happiness can only happen when persons are in love with God, the ultimate happiness referred to as human beatitude. In his *Summa Theologica*, Ia-IIae, Questions 1-5, Thomas states the only source of true happiness, "... the perfect happiness of heaven, where we will see God Himself through His essence." Achieving this ultimate end means a spiritual struggle, what St. Augustine called 'training' (see May17 instalment), because sinners can strive after finite ends that cannot result in happiness because they are illusions. On this point Thomas cited the gospel, "No man can serve two masters." (Mt. 6: 24)

Generally teachers of religious wisdom never image the last end for their disciples, for example, followers of Buddhism or Hinduism are never told what Nirvana is like and Jesus never described heaven. I suspect that they do not do so because the focus needs to be on how to earn the rewards of adhering to religious mores rather than becoming preoccupied by dreaming about them. This approach seems correct as coaches of sport and school teachers do not speak of the rewards of victory and graduation, respectively, but rather the work that needs to be put into the endeavour in order to achieve success. However, Thomas applies reason to have us begin to grasp the experience of heaven, at least to have us imagine it: After logically proving that no

created good can provide happiness (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, [loosely translated, the summary directed to pagans]) Thomas affirmed, with Aristotle, that the happiness of any creature is a consequence of participation in some endeavour, for Thomas, participation in God. He does admit, however, that there are three ways whereby persons can be happy: being joined to an uncreated good, then there is the imperfect happiness of this life, this is known by pleasures, and finally, the perfect happiness of heaven. But then a dilemma; although persons' beatitude is to be found in the uncreated God their happiness is not uncreated either. Granted, the object of human beatitude is the uncreated God but the action whereby persons achieve the uncreated object of their happiness is a created good; in this life persons cannot participate in God directly but in mundane relationships that connect them to God. This is mythologist, Joseph Campbell's Third Category Thought. (First Category is divinity that we cannot think, Second Category is the alluring mystery of nature, for example, and Third Category is the world of art, so in religious liturgy we participate in a world of art.) Persons' use their free will to choose goods/activities/relationships that point to those values that they believe will make them happy, for example, will participation in sin be chosen over charitable ventures or will the reception of the sacraments be chosen as the priority or will some other activity be found to be more choice-worthy?

When discussing what part or parts of the human person achieve beatitude, the sensitive or the intellectual part, Thomas' answers that both will be perfectly happy. He reasoned that in this life the senses provide the means for happiness by the acquisition of knowledge, or appreciating and experiencing the beauty of creation. The senses inform the interior life which is elated through participation and persons gain some concept of divinity when their senses allow them to imagine even a shadow of God's beauty. In heaven the process will be reversed: Thomas says that the happiness in heaven will be due to seeing God directly and the senses (since there is the resurrection of the body, spirit body as St. Paul called it) will secondarily be filled 100%: smelling a rose eternally, seeing a sunset eternally, hearing a beautiful melody eternally, etc. with never a break in sensual delights. On this point Thomas cites scripture, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him; and we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3: 2) Because "God is love," according to St. John, then the experience of heaven will not be a static viewing of a divine object but a dynamic, ever deepening, and exciting experience. Like a couple moving from dating to engagement, to betrothal, to wedding realize that their friendship demands the lifelong commitment of marriage because love is never the same. Love has so many colours that each moment has potential to offer lovers greater insight and a more fulfilling freedom. However, because this love is shared by imperfect and limited sinners it is a challenge to maintain, as we may hear, 'the honeymoon is over.' Because there is no sin in heaven, and God is Love itself, then the ideal of love's liberating, humanizing, and divinizing effects are limitless and cannot be imagined in this world. (1 Cor. 2: 9) Having the full realization of the infinite degree of love that God has for each person, the revelation that was Jesus' earthly mission, makes heaven, heaven. Eternal life's blissful and limitless joy offers some insight into what hell must be like and so the urgency of conversion: On this side of eternity God's mercy and eagerness to forgive is infinite, after death God's mercy remains but divine justice compels reward or punishment. We may find it hard to grasp because we do not think of God being powerless but because

sinfulness requires punishment God's hands are tied; God suffers the grief of being unable to show mercy because justice overrides him.

The conversion of St. Augustine offers insight into limited time's encounter with limitless eternity. "St. Augustine reflected upon the question of faith changes as he pondered the dynamics of his own conversion in his *Confessions*, or as Gary Wills has translated it, the *Testimony*. In Book XI (Ch. 14, par. 17) Augustine wrote that his musings on this subject led him to the question of time. The notion of time frustrated him because he found it impossible to conceptualize for others. Augustine was astutely clever and even prophetic because phenomenologist Martin Heidegger too would settle on time as a key element or ontological existential of the human being, the person that he called *Dasein*. (See Heidegger's book, *Being and Time*. As I interpret him, perhaps more accurately Heidegger could have entitled the book, "Being is Time.")

"Augustine, morally a man of his time, was being scientific about his meaning making. He wanted to understand the radical change in his life objectively. It was a major change, for he had left his former errant ways and dedicated his life to the Church of Christ as a bishop even as it was struggling at the fall of the Roman Empire. Time frustrated Augustine because he saw that the past was gone and the future was not yet and so both were not real. The present, as the flow between past and future is so fleeting that human beings are caught in the rapid passing of their lives. Although Augustine could not explain time he recognized it as the mechanism of his conversion. In Jesus' resurrection from the dead Augustine understood that his future had changed. Jesus had defeated death and thus opened up time into an eternity of endless possibilities for life!

"Strangely, the resurrection had altered or offered a perspective on all of time. Augustine recognized that the past was also changed; he saw the event of his theft of a pear and the fathering of his son, Adeodatus (God's little gift), as part of God's plan and call to conversion. Now all of his time: past, present, and future, belonged to the new meanings initiated by the resurrection. Augustine recognized that time was the agency or device that systematically precipitated a reworking of his former meanings so that he could access gospel meanings.... One can only appreciate, as I do, the genius of Augustine who wanted to understand the interior workings of his conversion." (Excerpted from my book, *The Theory of Religious Ministry to Youth*, p. 154-155)

Later in this book where I am discussing the Christ in Others Retreat (COR) for teens I returned to the subject of time and its role in evangelization:

"Past, present, and future emerge as the mechanism of the conversion of meaning in persons. St. Augustine had it right! (See chapter 3; p. 154-155) Life is renewed in a process of reconciliation of one's past in view of the future that God has opened for us through Jesus Christ. Prayer turns time into eternity. On COR the prayerful ambience that is created enables retreatants to stand on the threshold of eternity and suggests powerfully that they carry eternity within themselves. COR thus transforms time as an illusion (chronological time) into an eternal timelessness, the encounter with God. I am convinced that this is why candidates do not want to leave the COR retreat on Sunday evening. COR, like any other pastoral intervention, serves to break up the cycle of pain that people carry. Being separated from God's total salvation people suffer until their lives are totally with the Lord. The prayer on COR connects the adolescent retreatants with God and prolongs the connection by sustaining prayer for its three-day duration. Perhaps time is the clue to why Christianity is so wedded to the liturgical seasons; seeing

time in relation to the resurrection of Christ; prayer is time and time is prayer after the fact of Christ.

“In his encounter with Daniel Levinson, Fowler was to discover Heidegger’s insight about time’s ontological significance, “Being and time are profoundly linked in our experiences of self and others and in our ways of responding to our world.” (James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p. 110) On COR time ceases to be chronological, a measurable quantity. The clocks are covered in the building where COR is held and wristwatches are confiscated on Friday evening. Time is not permitted to be an oppressive illusion to obscure persons’ eternal being, it becomes what it really is, the agent of conversion. By COR’s transformation of time it facilitates the work of conversion and it awaits persons’ response to God.” (*The Theory of Religious Ministry to Youth*, p. 205) (Note that Heidegger’s phenomenology sees persons as Dasein: ‘being there, thrown in,’ to a world ‘ready at hand’ and Dasein has existentials by which it works out its possibilities. Two existentials are spatiality and temporality; persons choose their movements and their use of time. Existentials reside in persons, so time is not out there, on clocks or calendars, but in us. For example persons attending the same event experience their duration differently: quickly or slowly.)

What are the implications of the Paschal Mystery for the Christian life?

That which is obvious is that the fact of Christ is not a past event totally finished and complete but rather a mystery in which believers must take part, Rom. 10: 9. Sharing in Christ’s suffering as we saw (May 10), according to Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI, “...is a prelude to that full unity with him through the resurrection that we hope for...” (*Living With Christ*, Triduum, 2009, p. 128) According to Benedict the Christian life offers its members and the world hope by making, “... the truth of the Cross and the Resurrection present in our history. In this way the Christian becomes part of that process by which the first Adam, a creature of the earth, and subject to corruption and death, is transformed into the last Adam, heavenly and incorruptible. (1 Cor. 15: 20-22, 42-49)” The Acts of the Apostles record the changed lives of believers as they saw the ministry of witnessing to the resurrection as the priority, not only to alter their life directions, but the very purpose of human existence. Hearing the gospel implies responsibility because Jesus himself was a witness and he calls his disciples to do the same. Recall Archbishop Ambrozic’s preaching, “The resurrection makes Christ who he is,” (See April 15); he is most powerfully revealed by the mystery of the resurrection (Rom. 1: 3-4) and we, his disciples become who we are, hopeful witnesses to his and our resurrection. Time has turned into eternity. Alleluia.

We pray –

The Stations of the Resurrection

The Stations of the Resurrection, also known as *Via Lucis*, Latin for, Way of Light, encourage devotion to the resurrection by meditating upon the fifty days of Eastertime: Christ’s resurrection and resurrection appearances, his ascension, and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

1. Jesus rises from the dead (Mt. 28: 7)
2. The disciples discover the empty tomb (Jn. 20: 4-8)
3. Mary Magdalene encounters the Risen Lord (Jn. 20: 14-18)
4. The Risen Lord appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24: 13-27)
5. The Risen Lord is recognized in the breaking of the bread (Lk. 24: 29-32)
6. The Risen Lord appears to the disciples in Jerusalem (Lk. 24: 36-40)
7. The Risen Lord bestows his peace on the disciples and gives them authority to forgive sins (Jn. 20: 19-23)
8. The Risen Lord strengthens the faith of Thomas (Jn. 20: 24-29)
9. The Risen Lord appears by the Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 21: 10-12)
10. The Risen Lord forgives and commissions Peter (Jn. 21: 15-17)
11. The Risen Lord sends the disciples out into the whole world (Mt. 28: 16-20)
12. The Risen Lord ascends into heaven (Acts 1: 9-11)
13. Mary and the Apostles keep vigil (Acts 1: 12-14)
14. The Holy Spirit descends at Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-4)

2. A Message from the ECLS

In Pope John Paul II's message on the occasion of the 36th World Communications day, he asked "How does the Church lead from the kind of contact made possible by the Internet to the deeper communication demanded by Christian proclamation? How do we build upon the first contact and exchange of information which the Internet makes possible?"¹

How indeed? The Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments and the National Liturgy Office have created this website in an effort to improve communication and catechesis, especially at this time when the Church is revising all its liturgical books.

A members-only section has also been developed to allow diocesan directors and members of liturgy committees to carry on discussions via forums and members-only mail-outs.

As the Church grows in this age of technology so too does the need for progressive catechesis expand. While "electronically mediated relationships can never take the place of the direct human contact required for genuine evangelization"², we hope that this website becomes one of many resources used in the evangelization of Roman Catholics in Canada today.

Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments

¹ See: Message of the Holy Father John Paul II for the 36th World Communications Day (Sunday, 12 May 2002) no.5

² Ibid

[Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops CCCB Publications Office national de liturgie CDWDS](#)

3. You are invited to pray a Pentecost Novena led by priest-faculty of St. Augustine's Seminary of Toronto. Google – Novena Retreat for Pentecost, St. Augustine's Seminary. (The site misspelled Pentecost.)

4. **Hope for the resumption of Holy Mass.** Note this announcement from a pastor in New Brunswick:

“The government of New Brunswick has approved indoor gatherings of up to 50, with physical distancing, effective **Friday, May 29th, 2020.**

This means that starting on **Sunday, May 31st, 2020, (Saturday, May 30th, 2020 ...**Mass will once again take place at all churches in ... Pastoral Unit.” The following directions will be handed out at Mass. The Pastor goes on to say:

“Please Note: If you plan on attending Mass at..., you must phone or email me to let me know which mass you would like to attend, as we have to keep the total number of persons inside at 50 or less. (Contact me at...)”

COVID-19 Measures to be taken at Mass

- At all times, please maintain appropriate physical distancing. This includes before, during and after Mass. Members of the same household and people in a "bubble" may sit together, but otherwise, parishioners should sit at least 2 meters apart.

BEFORE MASS

- Doors at the entrance will be kept open or will be opened by a volunteer.
- There will be a volunteer with MANDATORY hand sanitizer/alcohol spray posted at the entrance.
- All books will be removed from the seating area, but there will still be bulletins and "Living With Christ" booklets available. If you take one/both of these, please bring it home with you after the Mass.
- There will be a maximum of 45 parishioners allowed at a single Mass (this will keep the total number of people gathered at less than 50 including the priest, reader, etc.).
- Any seating area next to the main aisle will be blocked off to allow appropriate physical distancing for parishioners when using the aisle at communion. Also, every other row (along with selected seats) has been blocked off to help maintain proper distancing.

DURING MASS

- There will be no collection taken during the Mass. Parishioners may leave their gifts in a designated container located inside the church.
- Please celebrate "sign of peace" using gestures (peace sign with fingers, bowing, etc.) without making physical contact (unless with family member/member of your "bubble")
- The individual dialogue of Communion (*"The Body of Christ....Amen"*) will be proclaimed collectively after the response *"Lord, I am not worthy...."*, and followed by the distribution of Communion in silence. Please use the distancing guidelines on the floor while approaching the area where communion is distributed. Those who wish to receive communion on the tongue must see the priest in the sacristy after Mass has concluded.
- All Holy water fonts must remain empty at this time.