

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

Instalment #7

(Note that these reflections are intended as prayerful meditations; the divine science of theology is a contemplation of the revelation of Jesus Christ. St. Anselm defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, 'faith seeking understanding.' One should read some part of the text and stop when concepts require thought. That which can transform the text into a prayer is by reading the scriptural texts when they are suggested.)

It is hoped that the last reflections on the Paschal Mystery of the Messiah have assisted our understanding of the dynamics of salvation, as human redemption from sin to eternal life was the mission of Jesus Christ. We read from the Preface for Pentecost Sunday, "For, bringing your Paschal Mystery to completion, you bestowed the Holy Spirit today on those you made your adopted children by uniting them to your Only Begotten Son." The Paschal Mystery enables us to understand God in the world correctly.

According to psychologists our first divinities are our parents and so it is understandable that God is generally not imaged accurately; the result of this misunderstanding has sinners work all kinds of rationalizations in their religious lives. Jesus imaged God correctly and his Paschal Mystery brings clarity to how God is related to persons to clarify what it means to be his disciple. This presentation intends to move us from appreciating divine action in the world to a self-understanding because Jesus gifts us with his mystery; the Christian life is intended to be an imitation of the Paschal Mystery of the Messiah. Holiness is achieved when one's life brings the Paschal Mystery of Christ into the world because the Paschal Mystery is both a spirituality (means) and a destiny (ends), the death and resurrection of the Lord.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has taught that simply being associated with Jesus is insufficient for salvation. The theme of St. Matthew's gospel is that one must do the will of God rather than just have an intellectual grasp of it. (Mt. 7: 21-23) Logically, doing the Divine Will means that we must first know what it is that God wills and this is simple to know but may not be easy to do. Knowing the Will of God is accomplished by answering this one question: What is the only thing that is new in the world after the resurrection? (It would be helpful to pause here and answer this question.)

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2004) to address human suffering through a meditation on the Book of Job, the biblical book that addresses this dimension of the human condition. In a lecture on his book Kushner emphasized that the title reads "When" and not 'if,' because persons can and will be blamelessly victimized: car crashes, diseases, natural disasters like avalanches, accidents, crime, etc. He pointed out that we have to forgive God for not creating a perfect world; for it often happens that, like Job, the wrong people suffer: the innocent, the good, those who do not deserve to be struck by punishing events. By alluding to poet Archibald MacLeish's play on the story of Job Kushner describes a different ending: God does not reward Job with generosity: "MacLeish's Job answers the problem of human suffering, not with theology or psychology, but by choosing to go on living and creating new life. He forgives God for not making a more just universe, and

decides to take it as it is. He stops looking for justice, for fairness in the world, and looks for love instead.

“In the play’s moving last lines, Job’s wife says:  
The candles in churches are out,  
The stars have gone out in the sky.  
Blow on the coal of the heart  
And we’ll see by and by....” (p. 159)

The issue is shifted away from a focus on the suffering and the struggle to explain why, to the questions, ‘What are we going to do about it?’ ‘What is to be our response *when* we and others suffer?’

This allusion to Kushner’s insight offers us the answer to the question about what is new in the world after the resurrection. It is forgiveness. (Rom. 5: 8) The Old Testament taught the law of love of God and neighbour (Mk. 12: 28-34) but Jesus surfaced the essential ingredient that enables the successful realization of that law. Life can only be lived unimpeded and well into the future when forgiveness is operative: We need to accept ourselves as we are; forgiving ourselves for not being the person that we want to be in comparison with others, our parents for not realizing our uniqueness but only wanting a nice girl/boy, our friends, peers, teachers, co-workers, spouses, etc. for not acknowledging our felt-dignity and by not doing so have hurt us.

MacLeish explained the ending of his play in, *Dimensions of Job*, (Nahum N. Glazer, ed.). “Man depends on God for all things; God depends on man for one. Without Man’s love, God does not exist as God, only as creator, and love is the one thing no one, not even God Himself, can command. It is a free gift, or it is nothing. And it is most itself, most free, when it is offered in spite of suffering, of injustice, and of death.” (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, p. 160) Later Kushner wrote, “We love (God) because he is the best part of ourselves and of our world. That is what it means to love. Love is not the admiration of perfection, but the acceptance of an imperfect person with all his imperfections, because loving and accepting him makes us better and stronger.” (Ibid. p. 160) For Kushner there is no answer to the question ‘why?’ in the face of tragedies and suffering, but he points us to that which is humanizing; what matters is how we respond to suffering. He would endorse an oft-quoted saying, “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” The Paschal Mystery of Jesus, the light of the world, shows us that “the acceptance of an imperfect person with all his imperfections,” is what forgiveness is.

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus is the incarnation of humanizing love precisely because his gospel is the forgiveness of sins; God loves persons despite their imperfections. The challenge that Christianity poses is that it invites proud sinners to accept this *good news* rather than insist on first making themselves perfect and so worthy and deserving of divine love. Once accepted and lived by his disciples, however, Jesus can restore persons to ‘the likeness of God.’ (The Church Fathers taught that we always retain the *image* of God but sin had obscured *likeness*.) By modelling forgiveness himself and then making it available to humanity as the pattern of relationships, the instrument powerful enough to establish peace on earth Jesus made possible the full realization and potential of persons’ humanity. On this point Kushner cited a nineteenth-century Hasidic rabbi, “human beings are God’s language” (Ibid. p. 154) and so Jesus sends the baptized

into the world as the Father sent him, and the Father sent the Son as the Paschal Mystery, specifically to be merciful, to forgive sins. (Jn 20: 21-23)

The Paschal Mystery of the Messiah is given to us as the solution to the mystery of our own experience because dying and rising is how normative human knowing and loving happens; evil is always mixed with good so moral persons are always tested to choose the best option as the way to mature and surface the good. This succeeds by imitating Jesus' spirituality, his *kenosis* (self-emptying). (Phil. 2: 7-11) He decentered himself in favour of the greater value of obedience to the Father, even to accepting death on the cross. Every time that humility is exercised by choosing the best option in the world of choices sacrifice is involved. (Sacrifice, from *sacrum facere*, {Latin,} means to make holy) Regardless of the degree of humility to which any decision demands, death is always present: the death of our (inordinate) desires, our prideful willing and selfishness. But selflessness enables persons to transcend to greater maturity as their sacrifice enables a greater good to be established in the world.

The good is not contained in a law but it is, as taught by theologian Bernard Lonergan, the result of human knowing and deciding as situations present themselves. There is no good in the world without this effort and commitment to choose wisely regardless of personal cost because, for example, as Jedi Master Yoda informed Luke Skywalker of the Star Wars saga in the tangled woods of Dagobah, the Dark Side is always 'easier and quicker.' (*The Empire Strikes Back*) The cross is always a present option in human decision-making and that is no accident but a divine gift. (1 Peter 4: 13-14) I recall seeing a painting of St. Catherine of Siena; I believe it was in her childhood home in Siena, Italy. It depicted Christ holding out two crowns to her, one was gold and jewel-studded and the other a crown of thorns; Catherine is reaching for the crown of thorns. Understanding the wisdom of the Paschal Mystery means to assume her insight that the cross is the opportunity to make the world a better place.

Jesus' death on the cross on Good Friday and his rising on Easter morning was not his first experience of the Paschal Mystery; the New Testament records that his entire life was one of suffering; born in a stable and rejected from his birth, constantly hated, harassed, and cross-examined by those whom he loved and sought to redeem, misunderstood by his closest disciples, betrayed and abandoned, permitting his mother to witness his death agony, etc. The aim of the Paschal Mystery is to set persons free (Gal. 5: 1) because when sinners insist on doing their own will it imposes the greatest enslavement possible and increases violence as Plato proved. Mature generosity and self-discipline are essential qualities to enhance life by overcoming one's evil desires. The prayer to the Great Manitou of the North American indigenous peoples captures this wisdom. We read, "I seek strength not to be superior to my brothers, but to be able to fight my greatest enemy – myself." The objectives of self-sacrifice, peace and unity in community, tell of the intelligence of the Paschal Mystery. Granted, 'heroism' is popularly assigned to those who make the ultimate sacrifice for others but Christian martyrdom is the way of life because, according to the saints, it is the love that goes into sacrifices that is pleasing to God not the size of the personal cost. (Lk. 21: 1-4)

In the reflection of May 31 we saw the need to struggle against evil, which specifically means resisting temptations to possess the object of our desires that can originate from any of five spirits according to St. Ignatius Loyola: God, the devil, the good angel, the bad angel, or ourselves. In this presentation we see that we need to do

more than avoid evil, the lesser, imperfect choices, but we need actively to do good by self-discipline; accepting to suffer sacrificially, to be inconvenienced, so that greater good can be experienced by others; this is how love of God and neighbour is realized.

The Sacrament of Baptism inserts persons into the Paschal Mystery by an overt and obvious drowning. But it also points to the ongoing Christian lifestyle and choice to die to the world. (Jn. 16: 25-33) The baptised rise from the water to receive symbols of the Christian life: the baptismal candle lit from the Easter or Paschal candle to signify the light of Christ, the white garment, and anointing of Christ as the promise of eternal life. One's baptism is only finished when the baptised take their baptismal commitment before the divine Judge; baptism is a way of life, to reject evil and strive after the good; the design and pattern of the Christian life is dying and rising.

Enabling baptism to achieve its sanctifying purpose imposes responsibility on parents and the Christian community to form each other through correction (Mt. 18: 15-20) so that every choice can be a loving one, and if suffering is involved, that it be accepted; (Col. 1: 24) *for better or worse, for richer or poorer, till death*. Doing so engages persons in the life of the Holy Spirit; this is how the Holy Spirit of God comes into our awareness and so becomes real. The sacraments do not work by magic but will always require the exercise of the faith so it is imperative that the community live the Paschal Mystery if the newly baptized are to recognize its wisdom. For example, theologian Bernard Cook has hinted that baptism is not the first sacrament to be received but rather the matrimonial sacrament of parents because a person's first experience of love and forgiveness is felt parental care. Faith begins to be formed even in infancy. Notice that the nuptial blessing at a wedding Mass occurs after the Church recites the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that prays for the blessing of forgiveness to enable the Kingdom to be established. (Lk. 4: 43) Christian marriage, like the Christian life as vocation, can only succeed when forgiveness is the order of the day.

All the sacraments of the Church replicate Christ's Paschal Mystery, dying and rising, and so too the New Testament scriptures constantly echo this mystery. For example, in making presentations on the *Star Wars* saga occasioned by my book, *Star Wars and the Message of Jesus*, I often pointed out the Paschal Mystery in each film. An obvious example occurred at the death of Obi Wan Kenobi. As he fought with Darth Vader, a duel with light sabres, he told Vader that if he killed him he, Kenobi, would become stronger. He then looked at Luke and the others attempting to escape and to save them Kenobi quit the contest, sacrificed himself by holding his sabre vertically, and awaited Vader's death-dealing blow that cut Kenobi horizontally. The clashing light sabres made a brilliant cross. Kenobi's body vanished and Vader stepped on Kenobi's abandoned clothes in search of his body. Kenobi's voice was then heard, "Run, Luke, run." Elements of the Paschal Mystery are present: A struggle with evil, a sacrificial and voluntary death of self for others, a cross, a resurrected body, and a post-resurrection appearance in Kenobi's voice.

Forgiveness is a death experience because the impulse to retaliate needs to be suppressed. In many cases forgiveness may seem impossible because it often flies in the face of common sense when anger and vengeance are justified as they meet the demands of fairness. Sometimes those who have forgiven terrible hurts have explained that forgiveness was not so much for the offender as for themselves because it freed them from pain; holding on to hate can be more dangerous than letting it go. Where past

offenses are concerned persons' worst enemy can be memory, we read, "Not the power to remember, but its very opposite, the power to forget, is a necessary condition of our existence." –St. Basil- (Excerpted from *Living with Christ*, June, 2020, p. 43.) However, forgetting is not a matter of denial and so we may search for an explanation of the dynamics of forgiveness.

On the contribution of psychology psychologist, Dr. Elizabeth Gassin, wrote a short article entitled, *Forgiveness, Head and Heart: Psychological and Theological Moments in the Process of Interpersonal Forgiveness*, that was presented at the Sacred Heart Communities in Collaboration National Conference, Cherry Hill, NJ, June 2001) She indicated that there are two contexts in which forgiveness becomes relevant: Firstly, a philosophical one because an injustice took place; something negative and undeserved was done to a person, and secondly, a psychological one due to the resultant anger and hurt that was experienced. Gassin offered four steps in the psychological process of forgiveness and three theological issues that move victims to reconcile. There is 1. a need for forgiveness, an internal process whereby the victim can overcome the pain in order to think positively about the offender, and 2. reconciliation, which means to reestablish a relationship with the offender. It is re-con-cilia-tion that incarnates God's love making enemies friends.

As he climbed the scaffold to his unjust execution St. John Fisher prayed Psalm 34 to evidence that he had processed his experience psychologically and theologically. Gassin concluded her text with thoughts of T. Hopko that offer insight into the mystery of forgiveness that offers insight into the cross. "... God on the cross faces all that (evil) and says, "it's real." And when he faces it and says it's real, He weeps over it, He grieves over it, He ... is appalled by it. But He is not victimize by it. And he doesn't let it poison him, so no matter how bad it is ... he says, "You're forgiven."...The forgiveness is there, and more than the forgiveness is the identification, the bearing of the burden of the sin of the other without acting in an evil way in return. This is what the word of the cross tells us ...The only way that you will redeem the other, the only way that you will help heal the other, the only way that you can expiate the sin of the other, is to take it on yourself... [N]ot in a sick way ...but...in sovereign freedom, in total dignity, in an absolutely voluntary act of love so that it's literally impossible that the evil will be victorious. It can't be, because you don't give it an inch. And one of the ways you don't give it an inch is by not denying it, but disclosing it, by seeing it for what it is ...This is why the cross is the great clarification, the great illumination of things the way they really are...We can participate in this victory, too, if we love with the love with which He loved us, if we face the evil the way He faced it...if we take it upon ourselves as He took it, if we forgive and have mercy...when we enter into Him, when our body gets broken and our blood is shed in love with Him, then we...co-redeem the world in Him, because we are called to be co-redeemers in Him, co-sanctifiers in Him by the power which He gives us, which is the power of the cross." (p. 9)

Gassin admitted that she is not a theologian but she ended her text with a plea to Christians reminding them that they, "are called to incarnate Christ in the lives of others. We do this in various ways: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for widows and orphans. Another way to bring healing...maybe even salvation! To self and others is to engage in this sacrificial act of forgiveness and reconciliation...expressing the redeeming love of Christ for the world. For many forgiveness and reconciliation with an

offender constitute a long, difficult path, but the Lord offers us provisions for this journey: His own forgiveness and His presence and power within us, received most fully through the mysteries of the Church. May God grant us all the will and courage to begin this journey of self-sacrifice, leading us to both intra- and interpersonal Resurrection with Himself.” (p. 12)

Forgiveness needs to characterize the Christian mindset (Mt. 18: 21-22) The parable by which Jesus illustrated forgiveness told the story of the king who forgave his slave’s great debt and of this slave who then refused to forgive his servant’s lesser debt. (Mt. 18: 23-35) We need to see that we have all been forgiven the great debt of our sins and so when we forgive those who offend us we are merely passing on a small measure of what we have received. Divine forgiveness has set us free and we are mandated to do the same for others. It is vital that we understand the Paschal Mystery of the Lord because it is our summons to holiness and the blueprint for the Christian life.

## 2. From Bishop Kirkpatrick

“Social distancing has caused a kind of involuntary fasting from sacramental reception of the Eucharist, and like all fasting, it should increase our desire for its return. This time of fasting also provides an opportunity to understand the Eucharist more fully as an act of self-offering joined to the perfect offering of Christ, the immaculate Victim.”

Dietitians and nutritionists have determined that the types of food we consume have a direct influence on our physical and mental well-being – truly, we are what we eat. St. Augustine said, “You are what you have received.” What we consume in our diets makes a noticeable difference in how we feel about our environment and ourselves and it has a direct impact on what we are able to accomplish in our daily lives.

If a change of diet makes a definitive difference in our well-being, how much more important to us and to our well-being is the reception of the Eucharist? When someone changes their diet, the effects are quite evident. The person becomes healthier and happier, more alert and more energetic. The Eucharist has the same effect on us – we live our faith with more energy and more vigour. We have been nourished; we can exercise more readily, what we believe.

On the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), we are invited to meditate upon the great mystery of the Eucharist. We are provided with a wonderful opportunity to focus on the liturgical axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* – the law of prayer is the law of faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it in simpler terms, “the Church believes as she prays” (1124). This means that if we believe, through the miracle of the Mass, that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, then our actions will reflect what we believe. The Blessed Sacrament should always be shown the greatest reverence and respect by our posture and actions at Mass. This is especially true when we receive Holy Communion. When we are able to gather again to receive Holy Communion, let us not forget WHOM we are receiving, and the prayer we offer. “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

3. Congratulations to Ms. Jillian Marie Fougere of St. John the Baptist Parish who won the Knights of Columbus Nova Scotia State Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded for excellence of achievement wherever the individual is involved and notably for offering selfless service to others exemplary of Christian charity.

4. From the Diocese: Help Our Parishes

“As Masses and events have been cancelled until further notice due to the public health threat of Covid-19, our parishes are losing important sources of collection and fundraising income. The diocesan Business Office is accepting donations for parishes during this time.

[Donate online](#) or mail your cheque (please do not send cash) to:  
Diocese of Antigonish, PO Box 100, Sydney, NS B1P 6G9”

Parishes have invented creative ways for parishioners to drop off their weekly support but for our parishes giving your regular donation to the person in your parish who receives, counts, and banks parish funds is a good way to support the parishes of East Richmond at this time. Total contributions and financial gifts were formerly published in the weekly bulletin. This is not happening presently but parishioners should be aware of how we are doing financially and the degree of financial support that is being received because COVID-19 has not arrested the bills for the upkeep of your church.

How has parish support changed since COVID-19, March, 2020? Here is a sample:

Total contributions, collection only, excluding other gifts such as food bank for pre-COVID-19.

February, 2020

SP - \$4, 844.40  
SJB - \$3, 571.50  
HGA - \$3, 117.60

Post-COVID-19

April, 2020:

SP - \$1, 575.00  
SJB - \$1, 875.00  
HGA - \$1, 190.00

5. I have been informed that the SJB glebe house has been sold, perhaps for use as an office.

6. It was previously announced that Sunday Mass could commence in New Brunswick on Pentecost because the Government permitted groups of fifty to gather. Then there was a

recurrence of the virus and the fifty-rule was rescinded. However, permissions have been reinstated so this Sunday, Trinity Sunday, Holy Mass may be celebrated.

#### 7. CitizenGo Reports: May 31, 2020

The United Nations estimates that 25% of all pregnancies end in an induced abortion -- between 40 and 50 MILLION worldwide.

**By such estimates, more than 13 million children have already been killed in the womb this year. As sad as the Coronavirus death toll is, it pales in comparison to this ongoing slaughter.**

And abortionists are using the crisis to expand their power.

Pro-abortion groups in Canada and in other countries have demanded that abortion providers be declared essential and given special privileges to keep their doors open, start giving out abortion pills through the mail, and gobble up hundreds of millions of dollars in new government funding.

CitizenGO stands on the front lines in Canada to stop this madness. And I am asking you and every CitizenGO member to be a voice for the voiceless and help us fight back:

**[That's why I ask that you sign this petition declaring that Every Life is Precious and demanding action from your officials right away.](#)**

It is up to CitizenGOers to fight the demands of the abortionists and the activist groups backing them up.

By uniting our voices through the Every Life is Precious petition, politicians in Canada and all over the world (other CitizenGO campaigners are joining this petition) are going to take note of a thunderstorm of pro-life demands.