

The Role of the Passion in the Faith-Justice Journey

To share in the light and blessings of Easter, we must share in the Passion of Jesus as a necessary and inevitable part of the faith-justice journey. For Jesus, his Passion was his sharing of, and identification with, the most abject, detestable and humiliating suffering in the human condition. By accepting death through crucifixion, Jesus thus shared the worst lot of the victims of human hatred and cruelty.

But Jesus not only participated in their lot but also brought hope into this abyss of darkness. By his surrender to the unalterable will of God in total trust even in the face of the experience of God-forsakenness, Jesus transformed this bitter negativity into a source of life. Through the patience, obedience and love that embodied his acceptance of suffering, he made it a life-giving reality. Jesus thus also opened up a new perspective on suffering and human tragedy when accepted in patience, obedience and trustful love of God and people. He thereby transformed the human condition in its bitterest and most negative into a source of liberation and life.

Our conscious sharing of Jesus' Passion entailed in the faith-justice journey is, when integrated, a true participation in this achievement of Jesus. Not only is it an act of identification with those who suffer oppression, but it is also an imitation of the patience, trust, obedience, and surrender of Jesus to God (his love of God) and his love of all humans. Through this, we also can transform the negativity we face when working for justice and peace into a source of life and of integral liberation. Recognizing our own weaknesses also becomes a share in the death of Jesus "for us and for our salvation," a share in the vicarious nature of his suffering in the interest of total human liberation.

The Cross Today

Reflecting on Jesus' suffering also helps us to discover in the Cross of Christ a new dimension, the terrible violence committed against millions of innocent people in modern history. When a small percent of the world's population consumes the great majority of the earth's resources; when millions of people are dying because drug companies are not willing to allow the production of low-cost generic drugs to fight HIV/AIDS; when more and more small farmers can no longer grow the food they need to feed their families and pay for modest necessities because trade regulations favor large multinational agricultural corporations; when health care and education cannot be funded in poor countries because the country is paying unending interest on development debt--in all instances where structural and systemic unjust is occurring--we see the suffering of Christ.

We know we are called to respond to this suffering and we know how weak we are, how little time we have to offer, how little energy we can muster to help. But it is in this recognition of our own limitations that we must say to Christ, "Thy will be done" and we take up the Cross, we take on the suffering of others as we suffer in our own frailty. Our journey of faith/justice will take us through pain - the pain of others and the pain of our own doubts and limitations. This journey is a great risk in modern society, and it goes against many of the values of contemporary culture. But it is finally a journey into the light, the enormous joy of Easter, the coming of the Spirit breathing new life, new inspiration into our wounded hearts. It is the journey into the healing Alleluja.

Adapted from a reflection by Fr. George Keerankeri, SJ

A Reflection on Hope for Justice from Micah 7: 8-9, 18-20

- 8 O my enemies, do not exult over me; I have fallen, but shall rise again;
though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is my light.
- 9 I will bear the anger of the Lord, for I have sinned against him, until he takes up my cause and gives
judgment for me; until he brings me out into the light, and I see his justice.
- 18 Who is a god like thee? Thou takest away guilt, thou passest over the sin of the remnant of thy own
people, thou dost not let thy anger rage for ever but delightest in love that will not change.
- 19 Once more thou wilt show us tender affection and wash our guilt, casting all our sins into the depths
of the sea.
- 20 Thou wilt show good faith to Jacob, unchanging love to Abraham, as thou didst swear to our
fathers in the days gone by.

The verses above are from a canticle to a Jerusalem which the prophet considers to be totally destroyed. The holy city is no more, the first verses declare. And yet, in the midst of this destruction, the canticle of hope for the sinful city arises. What these verses from Scripture say is very interesting because they offer an insight into the resolution of social injustice and also reflect on God's understanding of human reality. They are appropriate for an Easter meditation after the darkness and loss of Holy Week.

In these verses, **social sin** is implied as a reason for Jerusalem to be destroyed. Social sins are more than one individual harming another individual; social sins develop from an entire community's attitudes towards the poor, the sick, the suffering, and even God's creation (as we see today in certain policies and programs). These are sins against God and, because of this understanding, the destruction of the city is accepted by the speaker of the Scriptural verses from Micah.

As one continues reading these verses, it seems the very reference to God is a moment that finally allows the city to declare firm and proud words against its enemy (here, the foes of Israel and Judea). God is presented as the One who has destroyed Jerusalem for the love of the poor. Jerusalem, destroyed, has become in turn "poor." Suffering and darkness have paradoxically led to the light, as we see in the Holy Week and Easter story. This is why, as reflected in lines 18-20 in Micah, God defends the sinner as one who can understand his own life through God's grace. Through Christ's suffering, we can move beyond our own darkness, our own complicity in promoting values and actions that are not reflective of God's love. We can be blessed by a "love that will not change" when we are led into the light of Easter, a light that opens us to justice and peace.

The "city" in the verses from Micah is a community that waits for the overturning of a negative situation, which eventually becomes a double overturning. The beautiful and prosperous city has obvious social injustices. Its destruction is a fall into darkness, but that allows a reconstruction, a rising into recognition, guided by a new vision. (Where, in our own communities, do we need to be moved from certainties into a darkness that will lead us to reconstruct what it means to respect all God's children and all of Creation?)

It is interesting that in Micah, God's justice becomes a right of the city and becomes the light through which "one can see." What a difference from darkness! The praise in the final verses in the above Scriptural passage is for a God who removes sin and is merciful. **What God is interested in is not to judge and reward those who are good and punish those who are evil, but to rebuild just relations.** God is interested in building a more just world, where the term "just" does not refer to a retributive or legal justice, but to a world regulated by just reciprocal relations.

In verse 19 of Micah, the image of Exodus (15.5) in relation to the Egyptian troops is used: "the flood waters covered them, they sank into the depths like a stone." In Micah, we find a similar image: "He will treat underfoot our guilt and he will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins." The enemy that God will win over is no longer external to the people, but is within: it is those social sins that God will bury in the depths of the sea; his logic of love will guarantee the promise made to Abraham, that his descendants will be called to be brothers and sisters and live in right relationships to all God's creation.

Jesus did the same when he gave us the Our Father. The values expressed in that prayer should be the basis for us to build a global community and not a world where we seek our own well being without considering the interests of the others, or worse, in destructive competition with them. The call of Easter is the call to hope, to light, to right relationships and the joy of peace.

Adapted from a reflection by Fr. Stefano Bittasi, SJ

