

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 25th 2016

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

It may appear that the liturgy for this celebration is a result of four liturgical committees who had never spoken with each other. There are four distinct sections that do form a graceful harmony. There is the Liturgy of the Word, the praying of nine solemn petitions with each having a reflective introduction. The third form is the Adoration of the Cross which can take various ways of reverencing the enduring symbol of the death of Jesus. The final aspect of the liturgy is the Communion Rite or Service through which the congregation receives the Eucharist which had been consecrated during the Holy Thursday's liturgy. This-day's remembrancing is not the Sacrifice of the Mass, but a solemn consideration leading to the celebration of the Easter Vigil and Easter itself.

In sharing of dreams many men report that they have had dream-experiences of going to work or school without having on their pants. I am sure there are several interpretations available for this. Shame might be involved with these kind of dreams or just being found-out as simply quite human. It could be that pants represent cover-up and there lives a deep desire to be free of social conventions. There are also the recurrent dreams of showing up for an exam for the course we have forgotten to attend. For me it is always a math-final.

In today's liturgy, after our listening to the Suffering-Servant song from the Prophet Isaiah, as well as the hymn of Christ's obedience even unto death, from Paul's letter to the Philippian's, we are presented with John's account of Jesus' Passion. In this recalling of the final hours of His life, Jesus is pictured as experiencing his finest hour. This obedience of Jesus is not only his compliance to the Will and love of his Father, but his grateful acceptance of all that was his identity. Jesus was always and is always who he is. For John the Evangelist, Jesus is moving to a triumphal statement announced from the Cross. By his words and gestures Jesus on the Cross is the total sacramentalization of Who he was and is. He says it and he does it.

For Jesus, these hours are not a dream, though we can imagine he may have had day or night dreams about such an event. He literally is stripped of his clothing, but in a strange way, not of his dignity. His throne, his crown, his regal declarations are final and yet eternal. His whole life is consummated in this showing up and not avoiding his name and his message. It is so prayerfully important not to separate this day's events from all the other days and ways in which Jesus poured himself out upon the earth and upon us. We are saved by the Life, Death and Resurrection of our Savior.

Sacraments are combinations of words and gestures. Every action of his public life was a revelation of his truest self. His words accompanying these gestures noted what he was really doing. In this liturgy's Gospel's account, Jesus declares two exclamation words, "I thirst" and "Woman this is your son." In other Gospels Jesus makes other statements or words, but here in John there are these two statements announcing his interior.

The first time in John's Gospel we behold Jesus performing a miracle; His mother is present, seeing her son resolving an awkward, socially shameful experience of there not being enough wine. Now after three years of other changings of shame into honor, Jesus says to his mother, "Behold, now I am changing the shame of this-world's sin into the honor of being gathered back into God's family!"

The second word Jesus utters is that he thirsts. This physical desire is the sacrament of his longings for peace and reconciliation between God and creation. Soldiers bring him something to take away in him, that which cannot be resolved until he finally surrenders his life into his Father's hands and into ours. The interior of God has lived in the external and is most perfectly displayed on the Holy Cross. We move then from the consideration of his living onto death on the cross, to our bowing, genuflecting and or kissing the wood of a cross.

The liturgy concludes with our reception of him Who says to us that which he cried to His Father, "Into your hands I commend my spirit!" We receive his thirst for us and encourages us by the reception of his Body to continue his life within ours. It is indeed a very Good, actually the best, Friday.

Larry Gillick, S.J.-Creighton University's Deglman Center for Ignation Spirituality