



Entering the Passion with Jesus

By Jarrett Kerbel (04/03/26)

From the cross Jesus forgives those who are torturing him to death. That moment of grace, love and truth in the Passion narrative is breathtaking for me. I have a hard time forgiving my dental hygienist during a painful session in the dentist chair! Yet, Jesus, who has every reason for self-pity, rage, and lashing out against his unjust, cruel, shameful annihilation, has the spiritual capacity and freedom to de-center himself and focus on the spiritual plight of his tormenters.

Under unbelievable duress, Jesus stays true to his character and mission: to love others who are lost.

The loving forgiveness of Jesus - the grace he offers his killers - is also a gentle word of judgment. The killers would not need forgiveness if they were not committing sin. Jesus knows, of course, that forgiveness has a sting and a salve. Even more, he knows that the best way to come to moral awareness and true self-knowledge is through mercy, i.e. being caught out and loved at the same time! He is blessing his killers with that opportunity.

During Holy Week, I invite you to enter the Passion with Jesus. Put your whole focus on him during the liturgies that mark this week and you will experience a great spiritual reward. What is that reward? The capacity to draw on the suffering Jesus as a resource for facing your own faithful suffering.

Many folks I encounter react to suffering as an offense against the way things should be, as if we are all somehow entitled to a life without suffering or challenge. Nowhere in scripture does God promise us a life without pain. The real question is this, "How will you live faithfully with your pain, especially the pain that comes with faithfully following God?"

For me, this is a revolutionary statement. The Gospel is a tremendous comfort for all of us who are blessed to be persecuted and reviled for the name of Jesus. When we depart into the path of discipleship we should expect opposition, rejection, and suffering as the cost of faithful witness. The Passion of Jesus gives us the strength we need to hold steady in those places of attack, and even more, to stay close to the love of Jesus in those places.

As the Jesuits say, "Jesus is a man for others." His defining characteristic is that he is love and his love is for others and for God in perfect balance. As we grow into the full stature of Christ, we receive grace that sets us free to live the faithful life he teaches and portrays.

I am a long way from the full stature of Christ! Oh my! However, my Baptismal Vows do help me stay on track. Please review them in the Book of Common Prayer as we will renew them as a congregation on Easter.