



HOLY WEEK: PASSION SUNDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY 13 and 18 April
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The high road that leads to the living God”
(Pope Benedict XVI)

The new Catholic Society (CTS) Sunday Missal (People's Edition) published with the translation of the Scripture Readings in the English Standard Version – Catholic Edition has incorporated excerpts from the teaching of the Popes at the beginning of the texts for each Sunday Mass for Lent and Easter. On Palm Sunday of the Passion the quotation is from Pope Benedict XVI where he speaks of the Procession at the beginning of Mass as *“setting out on Pilgrimage along the high road that leads to the living God.”* It is indeed a special week for all of us, one where we enter into the Solemnity of Passion, Death and Resurrection in a unique and individual way that touches all of us personally.

Frequently I read the post of Father Patrick Van der Vorst on Facebook entitled ‘Christian Art’ where he reflects on the Gospel Reading and Art. His reflection on Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent 8 April is on John 8:21-30 and the picture taken from the Door Panel of Santa Sabina Church in Rome depicting the Crucifixion of Jesus. *“In this morning’s Gospel, Jesus says, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He.’ He is telling us that only when Jesus is crucified and lifted up on the cross will people truly recognise who He is. Jesus was God in human form, and His greatest act of love is seen in His crucifixion. The cross has become therefore the central symbol of Christianity, not because suffering is celebrated, but because it reveals God’s deep love for humanity. Jesus was sent to share God’s love and remained faithful to this mission, even when it led to his death. In the end, his sacrifice on the cross became the strongest message of God’s love, one that speaks to us even more powerfully than his words and actions during his life.”*

On Palm Sunday when the Passion is read we are conscious that like Simon of Cyrene we too must take up the Cross. Fr Ferlita in his commentary writes:

“The way of the Cross is Jesus way. Our attitude must be that of Christ, who “humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on the Cross.” (Phil.2:8).

Fr Ferlita concludes with this prayer:

“Jesus Lord, you have done so much for us, you have forgiven us so much. Make us truly grateful, truly loving. Help us to overcome our fears and place all our trust in you. Strengthen us as we follow in your footsteps, carrying the Cross, remembering how you “had to suffer these things and so enter into [your] glory” (Luke 24:26).

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At a time when “Assisted Dying” is so much to the fore in public consciousness because of the debate in Parliament, we are very aware that death for us Christians is the way to new life. A friend on Facebook, Fr Charles Blanchard, recalled recently his Mum’s death in a post:

“Sitting with Mom and witnessing the transition from life to death filled our hearts with grief, unsettledness and pain, reminding all of us some things are beyond our control. As she lay on her dying bed....Mom courageously acclaimed her faith in Jesus Christ by praying “Thy Kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!” Eternal rest grant unto her O lord and let perpetual light shine upon her. May her soul and the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.”

On Good Friday at 3 in the afternoon when we kiss the Crucifix we are showing our love for the one who first loved us, and joining our lives to his. It is a moving moment, a sacred moment. Friends of mine who will be away on that day in a largely Muslim country are worried they will miss that opportunity; fortunately they can take their Rosary and kiss the Crucifix to begin and end the Decade of the Rosary, reflecting on the Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord. If you cannot attend the 3pm Ceremony on Good Friday, then do go to the Stations in the evening!

We all have another special opportunity to mediate on The Passion and Death of Jesus when we celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross on Sunday 14 September. My priest friends who have come to join the Catholic Church from the Church of England have a special devotion to this feast. And I was very happy 2 years ago to be in the Cathedral – the Duomo-of Lucca in North West Italy where the wonderful image of the 8th century Crucifix called the Holy Face is being restored. People go there from all over the world to celebrate the “Volto Santo” on 14th September when a Procession in honour of the Triumph/the Exaltation of the Cross makes its way through the town. We should have the Crucifix in a place of honour in our homes, and continue to celebrate the love that shows us the way to new life, *“the high road that leads to the living God.”*

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