

In Passione Domini

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. Today is Church's most somber day; there is no Celebration of the Eucharist and everyone is encouraged to fast and to abstain from meat. This practice goes back to the Apostolic Era, when the Apostles gathered to commemorate the Passion of the Lord. To pray and to fast, to keep silence and to contemplate the Mystery of the Cross is the key to better prepare for the Easter Vigil.

B. In the First Reading we read the 4th Cantic of Isaiah's Suffering Servant. Pain of whatever kind is a punishment for most of us, but not for this mysterious Servant: *"He was spurned and avoided by people, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins."* God's paradoxical teaching is so hard to be understood by our society today for we tend to avoid suffering at all costs. While acknowledging that there is good in trying to alleviate suffering, especially, among children and the most vulnerable, there is a risk of missing out the Truth of the Cross: God uses his Son's pain and death, and death on the Cross to redeem us.

C. The refrain for our Responsorial Psalm is the one of the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross: *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."* Taken from Ps 31st and Lk 23:46, this psalm echoes the sorrowful salvific reality of Jesus hanging on the Tree of Life: as Jesus dies so painful death he gives life to us all.

D. For the author to the Letter to the Hebrews Jesus Christ is the High and Eternal Priest. He has been exalted and consecrated (perfected) the Pontiff at that same moment of his death on the Cross: *"In the days when Christ was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."* The priesthood of Jesus Christ perfected on the Cross is effective throughout all ages because the Sacrifice of the Cross (His Priestly ordination) did not end in the tomb. The Glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ brought his humanity into the realm of the divine, thus he is able to intercede (priestly office) for us eternally: *"Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin."* The Cross, understood thus, is not a shameful, insane, and ignominious tree, but rather, the Throne from whence God's love flows forth to redeem us: *"So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help."*

E. John's Passion is always read on Good Friday. Traditionally it is sung by three men who using the sweet notes of Gregorian chant transform the narrative into lamentation song. But this lament is not dull or melancholic; on the contrary, it is full of

hope and joy. The climax of John's passion is the enthronement of Jesus on the Cross, and during the process to arrive thence, Jesus is presented as always in control, as the real King that he is. Even onto the moment of death, Jesus does not die crying out in a loud voice, like it happens in the Synoptics; for John Jesus dies giving his Mother to John and asking Mary to be the mother of the Church in John, the beloved disciple. He also dies but uttering the word used in Leviticus for priestly consecration: *tetelestai* "it is perfected" or "it is finished," that is, with my death comes Heavenly Consecration (perfection) of the High and Eternal Priest. Jesus is rightly called **King and Priest** and we are joyful for having such a Capitan of Salvation: "*you say I am a King. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice' [...] When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, 'It is finished.'* And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit."

III. Meditatio

A. Jesus Christ's Cross was indeed shame for the Jews and insanity for the Greeks. For the modern reader it appears to be a sign that speaks of failure and death, since there was no tangible outcome to the ministry of Jesus, so they say... But the Cross is something totally different; it is the Throne of Grace and Forgiveness from whence Salvation comes for all mankind. As a matter of fact John teaches us that the Cross is the place in which the Son is glorified by his Father; intrinsic to that process of glorification is the resurrection of the human flesh in Christ's Risen Body.

B. The service on Good Friday is truly amazing and holy. During the veneration of the cross is sung an ancient chant, which is so old that it is partly in Greek and partly in Latin. The chant is called the **IMPROPERIA** or the **REPROACHES**.

Two cantors sing the following:

V. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi. V. Quia eduxi te de terra Aegypti, parasti crucem Salvatori tuo.

V. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me. V. Because I led thee out of the land of Egypt, thou hast prepared a cross for thy Savior.

The two choirs then sing alternately:

Agios o Theos!
 Sanctus Deus!
 Agios ischyros!
 Sanctus fortis!
 Agios athanatos, eleison imas.
 Sanctus immortalis, miserere nobis.

O holy God!
 O holy God!
 O holy strong One!
 O holy strong One!
 O holy immortal one, have mercy on us.
 O holy immortal one, have mercy on us.³

Two cantors:

V. Quia eduxi te per desertum quadraginta annis, et manna cibavi te, et introduxi te in terram satis bonam: parasti Crucem Salvatori tuo.

V. Because I led thee out through the desert forty years: and fed thee with manna, and brought thee into a land exceeding good, thou hast prepared a Cross for thy Savior.

Alternately the two choirs repeat as before:

Agios o Theos!
Sanctus Deus!
Agios ischyros!
Sanctus fortis!
Agios athanatos, eleison imas.
Sanctus immortalis, miserere nobis.

O holy God!
O holy God!
O holy strong One!
O holy strong One!
O holy immortal one, have mercy on us.
O holy immortal one, have mercy on us.

Two cantors:

V. Quid ultra debui facere tibi, et non feci?
Ego quidem plantavi te vineam meam
speciosissimam: et tu facta es mihi nimis
amara: aceto namque sitim meam potasti:
et lancea perforasti latus Salvatori tuo.

V. What more ought I have done for thee,
that I have not done? I planted thee,
indeed, My most beautiful vineyard: and
thou hast become exceeding bitter to Me:
for in My thirst thou gavest Me vinegar to
drink: and with a lance thou hast pierced
the side of thy Savior.

Alternately the two choirs repeat as before:

Agios o Theos!
Sanctus Deus!
Agios ischyros!
Sanctus fortis!
Agios athanatos, eleison imas.
Sanctus immortalis, miserere nobis.

O holy God!
O holy God!
O holy strong One!
O holy strong One!
O holy immortal one, have mercy on us.
O holy immortal one, have mercy on us.

The verses of the following reproaches are sung alternately by two cantors of each choir. The choirs respond after each verse: Popule meus . . . as far as the verse Quia.

V. Ego propter te flagellavi Aegyptum cum
primogenitus suis: et tu me flagellatum
tradidisti.
R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo
contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. For thy sake I scourged Egypt with its
first-born: and thou hast scourged Me and
delivered Me up.
R. O my people, what have I done to thee?
or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer
me.

V. Ego eduxi te de Aegypto, demerso
Pharaone in Mare Rubrum: et tu me
tradidisti principibus sacerdotum.
R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo
contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. I led thee out of Egypt having drowned
Pharaoh in the Red Sea: and thou hast
delivered Me to the chief priests.
R. O my people, what have I done to thee?
or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer
me.

V. Ego ante te aperui mare: et tu aperuisti
lancea latus meum.
R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo
contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. I opened the sea before thee: and thou
with a spear hast opened My side.
R. O my people, what have I done to thee?
or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer
me.

V. Ego ante te praeivi in columna nubis: et
tu me duxisti ad praetorium Pilati.

V. I went before thee in a pillar of cloud:
and thou hast led Me to the judgment hall

R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. Ego te pavi manna per desertum: et tu me cecidisti alapis et flagellis.

R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. Ego te potavi aqua salutis de petra: et tu me potasti felle, et aceto.

R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. Ego propter te Chananaeorum reges percussi: et tu percussisti arundine caput meum.

R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. Ego dedi tibi sceptrum regale: et tu dedisti capiti meo spineam coronam.

R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi.

V. Ego te exaltavi magna virtute: et tu me suspendisti in patibulo Crucis.

R. Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? Responde mihi.

The following anthem is then sung:

Crucem tuam * adoramus, Domine: et sanctam resurrectionem tuam laudamus, et glorificamus: ecce enim propter lignum venit gaudium in universo mundo. Deus misereatur nostri, et benedicat nobis: illuminet vultum suum super nos, et misereatur nostri. -- V. Crucem tuam . . .

of Pilate.

R. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me.

V. I fed thee with manna in the desert; and thou hast beaten Me with whips and scourges.

R. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me.

V. I gave thee the water of salvation from the rock to drink: and thou hast given Me gall and vinegar.

R. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me.

V. For thy sake I struck the kings of the Canaanites: and thou hast struck My head with a reed.

R. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me.

V. I gave thee a royal scepter: and thou hast given to My head a crown of thorns.

R. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me.

V. I exalted thee with great strength: and thou hast hanged Me on the gibbet of the Cross.

R. O my people, what have I done to thee? or wherein have I afflicted thee? Answer me.

We adore Thy Cross, O Lord: and we praise and glorify Thy holy Resurrection: for behold by the wood of the Cross joy has come into the whole world. -- (Ps. 66. 2) May God have mercy on us, and bless us: may He cause the light of His countenance to shine upon us, and have mercy on us. -- V. We adore Thy Cross . . .

III. Oratio

A. We begin our celebration in deep silence. The priest walks up into the Presbyterium and lays prostrate for a few minutes as a sign of humility and acknowledgement of God's infinite wisdom. The assembly joins in this powerful sing in prayer and contemplation. Then we all pray to obtain sanctification through the merits of Christ on the Cross: *"Lord, by shedding his blood for us, your Son, Jesus Christ, established the paschal mystery. In your goodness, make us holy and watch over us always."* (OP) Having read the Passion and meditated on its meaning we are invited to offer with the entire Church our prayers and supplications for all (UP). As we adore (lit. kiss) the Cross we sing the reproaches (See above) and we are reminded of the meaning of Christ's sacrificial death (*Crux Fidelis*) After receiving communion we pray that we be restored by the blessed death of Jesus Christ: *"you have restored us to life by the triumphant death and resurrection of Christ. Continue his healing work within us."* (PC) We conclude our celebration by asking the Lord to bless us who contemplated his Passion so that our hope in the Resurrection may be reassured: *"send down your abundant blessing upon your people who have devoutly recalled the death of your Son in the sure hope of the resurrection. Grant them pardon; bring them comfort. May their faith grow stronger and their eternal salvation be assured"* (Blessing).

III. Contemplatio

A. A Hymn to contemplate:

CRUX FIDELIS

From the Good Friday Liturgy (Venantius Fortunatus VI century)

Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla silva talem profert,
Fronde, flore, germine,
Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinet.

V. Pange, lingua, gloriosi,
Lauream certaminis,
Et super Crucis trophaeo
Dic triumphum nobilem:
Qualiter Redemptor orbis
Immolatus vicerit.

R. Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla silva talem profert,
Fronde, flore, germine.

V. De parentis protoplasti
Fraude Factor condolens,
Quando pomi noxialis
In necem morsu ruit:
Ipse lignum tunc notavit.

Faithful Cross! Above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be;
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee.

V. Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle!
With completed victory rife!
And above the Cross's trophy
Tell the triumph of the strife:
How the world's Redeemer conquer'd
By the offering of His life.

R. Faithful Cross! Above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.

V. God, his Maker, sorely grieving,
That the first-made Adam fell,
When he ate the fruit of sorrow,
Whose reward was death and hell,
Noted then this Wood the ruin,

Damna ligni ut solveret.

R. Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinet.

V. Hoc opus nostrae salutis
Ordo depoposcerat:
Multiformis proditoris
Ars ut artem falleret:
Et medelam ferret inde,
Hostes unde laeserat.

R. Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla silva talem profert,
Fronde, flore, germine.

V. Quando venit ergo sacri
Plenitudo temporis,
Missus est ab arce Patris
Natus, orbis Conditor:
Atque ventre virginali
Carne amictus prodiit.

R. Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinet.

V. Vagit infans inter arcta
Conditus praesepia:
Membra pannis involuta
Virgo Mater alligat:
Et Dei manus, pedesque
Stricta cingit fascia.

R. Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla silva talem profert,
Fronde, flore, germine.

V. Lustra sex qui iam peregit,
Tempus implens corporis,
Sponte libera Redemptor
Passioni deditus,
Agnus in Crucis levatur
Immolandus stipite.

R. Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinet.

V. Felle potus ecce languet:
Spina, clavi, lancea,
Mite corpus perforarunt,
Unda manat, et cruor:

Of the ancient wood to quell.

R. Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee.

V. For this work of our salvation
Needs must have its order so,
And the manifold deceiver's
Art by art would overthrow,
And from thence would bring the healing,
Whence the insult of the foe.

R. Faithful Cross! Above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.

V. Wherefore when the appointed fullness
Of the holy time was come,
He was sent who maketh all things
From th' eternal Father's home,
And proceeded, God Incarnate,
Offspring of the Virgin's womb.

R. Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee.

V. Weeps the Infant in the manger
That in Bethlehem's stable stands:
And His Limbs the Virgin Mother
Doth compose in swaddling bands,
Neatly thus in linen folding
Of her God the feet and hands.

R. Faithful Cross! Above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.

V. Thirty years among us dwelling,
His appointed time fulfilled,
Born for this, He meets His Passion,
For that this He freely willed:
On the Cross the Lamb is lifted,
Where His life-blood shall be spilled.

R. Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee.

V. He endured the nails, the spitting,
Vinegar, and spear, and reed;
From that holy Body broken
Blood and water forth proceed:

Terra, pontus, astra, mundus.
Quo lavantur flumine!

R. Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla silva talem profert,
Fronde, flore, germine.

V. Flecte ramos, arbor alta,
Tensa lax viscera,
Et rigor lentescat ille,
Quem dedit nativitas:
Et superni membra Regis
Tende miti stipite.

R. Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinet.

V. Sola digna tu fuisti
Ferre mundi victimam:
Atque portum praeparare
Arca mundo naufrago:
Quam sacer cruor perunxit,
Fusus Agni corpore.

R. Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis!
Nulla silva talem profert,
Fronde, flore, germine.

V. Sempiterna sit beatae
Trinitate gloria:
Aequa Patri, Filioque;
Par decus Paraclito:
Unus Trinique nomen
Laudet universitas.

Amen.

Earth, and stars, and sky, and ocean,
By that flood from stain are freed.

R. Faithful Cross! Above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.

V. Bend thy boughs, O Tree of glory!
Thy relaxing sinews bend;
For awhile the ancient rigor,
That thy birth bestowed, suspend:
And the King of heavenly beauty
On thy bosom gently tend!

R. Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee.

V. Thou alone wast counted worthy
This world's ransom to uphold;
For a shipwrecked race preparing
Harbor, like the Ark of old;
With the sacred Blood anointed
From the smitten Lamb that rolled.

R. Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.

V. To the Trinity be glory
Everlasting, as is meet:
Equal to the Father, equal
To the Son, and Paraclete:
Trinal Unity, Whose praises
All created things repeat.

Amen.