

Monday: Holy Week—A Dangerous Memory

Friends,

An accurate remembrance of Jesus' torture and murder during Holy Week and of His response of nonviolent love to the violence directed against Him is a very dangerous memory. It is dangerous first of all because it is a memory that ends in Jesus' total destruction, with His friends betraying Him, running away and hiding in fear for their lives. All hope that Jesus, the incarnational paragon of nonviolence and nonviolent love was going to bring about significant social, political or religious change in things as they are and as they always have been was—as of three o'clock in the afternoon on Friday of Holy Week—as dead as Jesus. Jesus was dead wrong; the meek never have and never will possess the earth. The violent rule. The default option of all ruling power comes from the barrel of a gun. The violent may tolerate the likes of the nonviolent Jesus for a while but can and will do-him-in if ever they feel the need to do so. As of Saturday of Holy Week, Jesus changed nothing socially, politically or religiously in Israel or in the world. That is a dangerous memory for any Christian who espouses any rendering of Constantinian Christianity—conservative, liberal or radical.

Tuesday: Holy Week—A Dangerous Memory

Friends,

A second reason that an accurate remembrance of Holy Week and of the Passion of Jesus in the *anamnesis* of the Eucharistic Prayer are potentially dangerous memories is that memory defines known history. If the only memory available is the memory of those who were the victors, who successfully prevailed, then the very identity of people is formed from the narration of these memories and from the values, attitudes and beliefs the victors and the successful embody and encourage. Generally there is hardly any remembrance in history of the losers, the oppressed, the forgotten, the broken, the victims—like Jesus of Nazareth.

When secular and religious memory is controlled by the 1%, it is assured that what they include and what they erase, what they emphasize and what they downplay, what they glorify and what they ignore in memory, and therefore in history, has as its purpose creating an identity for human beings, which is thoroughly consistent with the interests and needs of the 1%. As Johannes Metz writes, “*Selective memory that remembers only the triumph of the powerful and “screens out” the agony of their victims, creates a false consciousness of our past and an opiate for our present.*”

Since grace works through nature and not independent of it, the primal experiential memory during Holy Week should be the primal natural phenomena of Holy Week, the agony of the victim Jesus at the hands of the powerful, and by empathic extension the agony of all victims of the “great ones.” But it is not. Such a memory is too dangerous to the 1% of this world, who have built their victories and success on an ongoing, *en masse*, agonizing crucifixion of human beings. But if memory is distorted, by commission or by omission, to that extent it will distort any spiritual, metaphysical or mystical experience and/or interpretation derived from it.

Martin Luther said of the princes of Germany who were protecting him from the violence of the Church of Rome but who were also being attacked by the peasants they had been brutally oppressing for generations, “*It is easier today for a prince to get to heaven by killing a peasant*

than by prayer.” The memory reflected upon in sermons and homilies and pieties during Holy Week, like the memory presented during the Eucharist, is composed and mediated, since the time of Constantine, by the victorious 1% and their kept scribes. Think about that and the dearth of concern about the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies in all the Churches of Christianity today and for the last 1700 years.

Wednesday: Holy Week—A Dangerous Memory

Friends,

A third reason that accurate remembrances of Holy Week and of Jesus’ Passion in the *anamnesis* of the Eucharist Prayer are potentially dangerous memories is that such memories do not look only to the past; they also look toward the future. Acute memories of acute human suffering have the power to motivate people to make life better in the future, especially if the particular suffering remembered is still unabatedly operative in the world. New memories of human suffering or new insight into well-known memories of human suffering can reveal the tragic flaw in the taken-for-granted worldview of a group. Pondering the memory of a single suffering person has the power to undermine the prevailing myths by which a secular or a religious society and its rulers live and operate, e.g., the memory of one Third World mother in agony and out of her mind with horror holding her child who has just been decapitated by a First World drone or smart bomb. But, memory must be kept alive for it to have a future and not just a past.

The Church is supposed to be the bearer of the dangerous memory of Jesus, a victim of the violence of the powerful, and by compassionate extension the bearer of the dangerous memory of all the victims of the violence of the powerful across the ages down to this very day. The Church is supposed to be the bearer of the dangerous memory of Jesus’ torture and death that motivates witnessing to humanity by word and deed to overcome evil with good (Christlike *agapé*). The Church is supposed to be the Body of Christ that responds to its own violent victimization in the Way it remembers Christ responded to His violent victimization—thereby breaking the perennial cycle of violent reciprocity, retaliation and revenge by returning good (*agapé*) for evil. The Church is supposed to be that group of people who hears and listens attentively to the anguished cries of intolerable pain of the victim of the violence of the powerful, Jesus of Nazareth, and by the grace of His cries hears, with compassion and urgency, the anguished cries of all the victims of the violence of the powerful. But is this what the institutional Church is?

Do the Churches of Christianity, in whatever nation they may be situated, proclaim the memory of Jesus in such a way that it draws Christians and others into *strongly identifying with* the victims of the violence of the powerful, beginning with Jesus? Or, is the proclamation of the memory of the torture and murder of Jesus by the institutional Churches of Christianity made so metaphysically and mystically circuitous and innocuous that these Churches nurture their Christian people into *strongly identifying with* the powerful and their violent agents, who operate out of the same spirit and myth as their occupational predecessors, the torturers and murders of Jesus?

Thursday: Holy Week—A Dangerous Memory

The Eucharist, thanks to which, God's absolute 'no' to violence, pronounced on the cross, is kept alive through the centuries. The Eucharist is the sacrament of non-violence!

—RANIERO CANTALAMESSA, O.F.M. Cap. (March 11, 2005)

The *narrative* of Jesus' Passion and death was the first part of the Gospel Tradition to acquire a fixed structure and, of all portions of the Gospels, was the first to be included as a recited liturgical remembrance. Note it is the *narrative* of Jesus' Passion and death that was the central remembrance around which the Gospels took form and that was the primal remembrance of Christian liturgical recital. Note also, it was *narrative*, and only *narrative*, tethered intrinsically to the Gospels' Passion *narrative*, which was primal and paramount—not theological, metaphysical or mystical expositions of the Passion of Jesus.

Probably a billion Christians participate in the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, the *Agapé* Meal, the Mass, the Divine Liturgy with some remembrance of Jesus' Passion and death every week. Moreover, billions of other Christians over the last two thousand years have also participated in the Eucharist. Think what the Church and the world might be today, if today and yesterday, Christians continuously heard in the *anamnesis*/remembrance narrative of the Eucharist Prayer—instead of the verbal generalities “suffered” and “died” as the remembrance of Jesus Passion and death—a narrative of particulars drawn directly from the narratives of the Gospels. For example, suppose that instead of simply “suffered and died,” a billion Christians this week heard and billions of Christians going all the way back to the time of Constantine continuously heard and pondered a liturgical recital of the Passion narrative along the lines of the following: what would be the state of the Church and humanity at this moment?

...On the night before He went forth to His eternally memorable and life-giving death, like a Lamb led to slaughter, rejecting violence, loving His enemies, and praying for His persecutors, He bestowed upon His disciples the gift of a New Commandment:

**“Love one another. As I have loved you,
so you also should love one another.”**

Then He took bread into His hands, and giving thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying:

**“Take this, all of you, and eat of it,
for this is my body,
which will be given up for you.”**

In a similar way, when the Supper was ended, He took the chalice. And once more giving thanks, He gave it to His disciples, saying:

**“Take this, all of you, and drink from it,
for this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and eternal covenant,
which will be poured out for you and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins,
“Do this in memory of me.”**

Obedient, therefore, to this precept of salvation, we call to mind and reverence His passion where He lived to the fullest the precepts which He taught for our sanctification. We remember

His suffering at the hands of a fallen humanity filled with the spirit of violence and enmity. But, we remember also that He endured this humiliation with a love free of retaliation, revenge, and retribution. We recall His execution on the cross. But, we recall also that He died loving enemies, praying for persecutors, forgiving, and being superabundantly merciful to those for whom justice would have demanded justice. Finally, we celebrate the memory of the fruits of His trustful obedience to thy will, O God: the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand, the second and glorious coming. Therefore we offer You your own, from what is your own, in all and for the sake of all...

—Excerpt from THE NONVIOLENT EUCHARIST (1991)

The intentional erasure or hiding or ignoring of a memory or of history always serves an end. It is not possible to envision any spiritual advantage or to find any good end that is served by truncating the Eucharistic Passion narrative down to “suffered and died.” Such an extremist shrinking of the narrative of Jesus’ Passion all but converts the Eucharistic *anamnesis* into a liturgical instrument of amnesia.

Holy Thursday of Holy Week is a dangerous memory because it is the memory of the institution of the Eucharistic with its two commands: “*Do this in memory of me,*” and the “*new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.*” If the *memory of me* is bowdlerized, then the content and meaning of the *new commandment* will be correspondingly bowdlerized. And, the consequence of this interconnected and interactive bowdlerization will be, in the Church and in humanity, what? Look out of the window or turn on the television!

The insertion by the Churches of Christianity of a *narrative* of Jesus’ Passion—as clear and as descriptive as the narrative of the Gospels—into the *anamnesis/remembrance* of their Eucharistic Prayer is a requirement of truth, a requirement of *agapé*, a requirement of fidelity to the Word of God Incarnate. It is a gift all Christians need to receive from the leaders of their various Churches. It is a witness to the grace of the cross that all Christians and all humanity need to encounter in Christian practice.