

“DYING AND RISING” AN ECOLOGICAL REFLECTION FOR HOLY WEEK

As we enter the sacred mysteries of Holy Week we are conscious of a traditional call to conversion. For many, the Paschal Mystery is all about human redemption. Yet also impinging on our consciousness is the call to ecological conversion expressed urgently by Pope Francis and numerous other religious leaders. What is this ecological conversion?

The *Laudato Si’ Movement* defines ecological conversion as the “transformation of hearts and minds toward greater love of God, each other, and creation. It is a process of acknowledging our contribution to the social and ecological crisis and acting in ways that nurture communion: healing and renewing our common home.”¹ An evolving reflection on Holy Week offers us a way of understanding and committing to this wider conversion as once again we walk the journey from Palm Sunday to the cross and onward to resurrection.

As Holy Week begins we witness the procession of Jesus into Jerusalem. Scripture scholars remind us that alongside Jesus’ procession was another on the other side of the city; a great imperial procession. This procession was marked by majestic triumphalism, an exhibition of power, oppression, wealth and military might; some of the very characteristics of which we are aware in our own times as more and more people are crushed and the land decimated. The cry of the poor is indeed the cry of the earth!

Jesus’ procession, Marcus Borg points out, deliberately countered what was happening on the other side of the city. It was a procession of peasants, the marginalized who looked to Jesus for hope, who were embraced and affirmed by his very self-offering.² His living and dying is at the heart of the Gospel and the dynamic in all of creation. Jesus walks towards his crucifixion as the whole of creation groans and suffers (Romans 8:22). The redemptive act of Christ then is not only for us humans, but for all of creation – a cosmic redemption that costs all. As Holy Week begins in which procession do I find myself?

¹ See: laudatosimovement.org/news/what-is-an-ecological-conversion-en-news (accessed March 6, 2023)

² Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, “The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach us about Jesus”, 2007

Through the days of Holy Week, we accompany Christ on the road to crucifixion – a road to conversion. We are called, said theologian Sallie McFague, to embrace “cruciform living” for our times. In her book, “Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology for a Planet in Peril”, McFague is clear that if we are to be Christian disciples of integrity today we must witness to the cross in the realities of a broken world marked by extreme human suffering and earth’s destruction. Ultimately, our call to walk with the crucified Christ will lead us to a radically prophetic view of the abundant life; one that is centered not on endless consumerism and life-destroying practices but in re-imagining the world in just and sustainable ways. Conversion will be guided by a “philosophy of enoughness”, a spirituality of inconvenience, sacrifice with that of Christ, for the sake of the other.³ We will share earth’s resources, we will wash feet, we will struggle in the garden, we will embrace the cross and it will cost all! As we enter the days of Holy Week this year what will this ecological conversion look like in our day-to-day living?

And after the cross comes the stillness of Holy Saturday with its invitation to liminal space as we stand outside the tomb between what was, is now, but not yet. We are called to Sabbath waiting, to restfulness and disquiet. We are challenged by this day to live our days in letting go, leaving fallow, embracing a life of greater simplicity, to the contemplation of possibility as with tenderness we touch the earth and its suffering peoples. We wait, we rest from all of our destructive ways and with the new day will come the light of resurrection in the world, the light of the Cosmic Christ - the Christ of new life.

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On behalf of the Federation Ecology Committee

³ Sallie McFague, “Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology for a Planet in Peril”, 2001, p. 14