

2011 Lenten Reflections

A Reflection on the Sixth Week of Lent – Holy Week

This Holy Week, the church again begins the familiar sacred journey of our savior and brother, Jesus. How many times have we made this journey with him? Have we done it so often that it has become *too* familiar? Might it be time to make the journey this year through different eyes?

In order to attempt that new perspective, we are invited to spend some time with the women and men in the Gospel who are part of the events of Holy Week. They are all introduced to us on Palm Sunday in Matthew's Passion account. It might be helpful to prayerfully read through the text for yourself. This is an invitation to accompany them as they journeyed with or encountered Jesus along the way. These were real people who may have something to teach us about life and love, about friendship and betrayal, about bravery and cowardice – and ultimately about the impact that Jesus had on each of them.

For our reflection this week, we'll first focus on Peter and Judas.

We meet Peter at the Last Supper as his usual loveable, boasting, inappropriate self – swearing his faithfulness with swagger and bravado born of his deep, passionate love of Jesus. Of course Jesus knew Peter far better than Peter knew himself. Jesus knew Peter's love, but also his fear. Imagine what it was like to have been Peter when he realized fully what he had done – he had denied knowing the man to whom he had committed his life. But even in his bitter anguish, Peter believed that Jesus' forgiveness and mercy were far greater than his betrayal.

Not so with Judas! He was convinced that Jesus was on the wrong path. Judas had decided to save Jesus from himself by handing him over to his enemies. When the full impact of his actions flooded over him, he desperately tried to undo his decision. Too late! Jesus is led forth to death, and all Judas could focus on was his guilt. How different from Peter! If only Judas could have trusted that God's mercy was greater than any sin of his. May our trust in God's mercy never lead us to such a place!

Then there are some of the women we meet this week. Holy Week begins with Martha and Mary hosting a party to celebrate their brother Lazarus' return from the dead. We witness the tender gesture of Mary anointing Jesus' feet. How much these siblings loved Jesus; how precious was his friendship to them. What sorrow must have filled them as the week ended with his crucifixion and death.

We can scarcely imagine what this week must have been like for Mary, the mother of Jesus. What must she have experienced as she stood at the foot of the cross? Had she seen all this coming? The growing antagonism, the arrest, the trial, the cruel treatment? She watched his dear hands and feet nailed to the cross and witnessed God's beloved Son, innocent and free from sin, raised up like a common criminal to die at the hands of the very people he came to serve and save. We cannot even begin to imagine her sorrow.

Mary Magdalene also stood at the foot of Jesus' cross. Let us stand with her and let her share her memories of what it was like to be healed by Jesus and then share life, friendship and ministry with him. Let us ask Mary to share her love for Jesus with us and how we might love him more deeply. Imagine her telling us what it was like to watch Jesus die, stay behind to watch his burial, and then wait until after the Sabbath to return – only to find an empty tomb.

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There are others with whom we can spend time this week: Veronica, Simon of Cyrene, Pilate, Pilate's wife – just to name a few. Perhaps in walking the path with them this Holy Week we can experience the power and mystery of this sacred time as we contemplate the astounding, unconditional love our merciful God revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.