

We have just encountered a confusing and emotion-filled journey – it starts with happiness and triumph, runs head-smack into despair, destruction, and death, and ends, well, to be frank, we may not be sure how it ends. We need to remember, however, that this entire turn of events is in response to something – something that our ancestors did, something that we did, something that every Image Of God has done, since God began creating us. Let us go back to the very beginning:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

....

the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

....

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, ... and I hid myself.' He said, '... Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' Then the Lord God said: 'What have you done?'

All of us, at one time or another, have desired our own way instead of God's – it is our human failing. All of us have desired to decide for ourselves what is best for ourselves, to know good from evil not by God's decision, but by our own – in effect, to define for ourselves what is good, and what is evil. And in that, all of us have died – died a separation from He who sustains us in love, God our loving Father. I think, just like me, you too must admit in your hearts of hearts that you, perhaps frequently, have wished this – to define for yourself what is good, and to grasp for it. We see it in our society all the time.

That was the situation with Adam and Eve; that was the situation in Jesus' time; that is the situation in the world today. In today's readings, we find out God's response.

In our opening Psalm, we are reassured. The first thing we are told is that God's steadfast love endures forever. Jesus told us time and again, through parable, story, argument, through giving, healing, listening, caring: God loves. God is the most loving parent you can imagine. God loves. The Psalm continues: Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through. Jesus said to us in John 10:7: "I tell you: I am the gate for the sheep." Jesus is our gate. The Psalm continues with "You have become my salvation." Jesus is our salvation. And the Psalm states: "The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" In the rest of the readings, we experience how thoroughly indeed Jesus was rejected, and we will find out that indeed, everything does depend on Him. The Psalm is all about Jesus!

The reading, from Matthew, of Jesus coming in on a donkey recounts a prophecy in the book of Zechariah (9.9): "Tell the people of Zion, 'Look, your king is coming to you, unassuming and seated on a donkey'"

A donkey was an animal of peace, whereas a horse was an animal of war. In acting this out, Jesus was announcing He was a king indeed, but not just any king: He was the King Sent From God, and His was a kingdom of peace. The crowd understood this and spread their cloaks and branches in front of him –

in effect, gave Him the red-carpet treatment. Every messianic expectation is now at the point of realization – Jesus is being proclaimed not only king, but Messiah-King.

But then we flip from Jesus' triumphant entry to His humiliation and destruction, like a pail of ice and slush being thrown into our face.

Our reading from Isaiah is also talking about Jesus: *I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting ... I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame ...* this is Jesus not triumphant, but under attack. Psalm 31 likewise: Jesus suffering, Jesus abandoned, Jesus withering under persecution.

In Philippians, we are brought into the story. Paul tells us: Be of the same mind as that of Christ!!!

-- became as a slave

-- obedient even to a painful death

Jesus' own spirituality is the prime example of Christian life. His spirituality was that of humble obedience, which God recognized by exalting Him above all others. Status is gained not by "looking out for number one" but rather by humbly sacrificing oneself for others. This is hard for us – but it is the way of God.

And we are about to find out how great that sacrifice is, indeed. A sacrifice given to save us.

Jesus knew better than anyone what was about to happen – in fact, I think He pushed it forward, and made *sure* it would happen. While He is eating the passover meal with His disciples, He announces "one of you will betray me" -- and He does nothing to stop Judas, or change what will happen – He just announces it. Then, He initiates our Holy Thanksgiving, our Holy Eucharist, our Communion: "This is my body, broken for you." "This is my blood, of the covenant, poured out for many for their sins." Eat. Drink. In other words: *I am the sacrifice, and you are the Priests who consume it.* Think of that, each time you come for communion: He is the sacrifice, and you are the Priest consuming.

Peter swears to follow Jesus to the death if need be, and then promptly denies Him three times out of cowardice. Have any of us done that?

Jesus asks His disciples to stay awake with Him, and they repeatedly fall asleep. Have any of us done that?

Jesus is rejected by all of humanity: the spiritual leadership, here represented by the Jews, and the temporal power, here represented by the Romans. All the power of humanity is focused on destroying the Son of Man, so that Man alone, without God, may reign supreme.

So we killed Him. And it was terrible.

But at that moment...

The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. *There was no longer any separation between where people dwelt, and the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt.* The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. *Many rise from the dead, signalling that the death of Jesus is the last judgement on sin. This is also the event that will cause many to be alive again. We say it every Sunday in the creed: "I believe in the Resurrection of the Dead."*

And we are left with Jesus being buried, and the statement: "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'"

So though we don't know for certain, we can suspect that something momentous is going to happen – something that will make Easter a mind-blowing event for all.

The story starts with us walking away from God, and wanting our own way. Then the Lord God said: 'What have you done?' The story ends with God literally killing Himself to get us back – and then the Lord God says to us, lovingly, gently, with a smile: 'What have I done?'

Amen.