

Walking Through Holy Week

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Hello everyone, I'm Karen May and I am so excited to share with you my book, "Walking Through Holy Week." We are going to journey with Jesus from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. And I want to show you how the masses of Holy Week invite us to become a part of that story.

Opening Prayer

Let us begin with prayer. *In the name of the Father and of the Son. and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Sweet Jesus, I thank you. I thank you for your gift of your life for this gift of Lent and the gift of Easter. Help us Lord to see how we are part of your story and how you are always a part of ours. I ask this in your name, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

The Masses of Holy Week

So, the masses of Holy Week are something that I have loved for a long time. I wrote this book a couple years ago, but I have been wanting to write it for many years. Once I discovered that these masses not only told us the story of Easter but helped us to go into that story. We don't have props any other time of the year, but Palm Sunday, we have palms. We are part of the crowd, welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem. But if we like so many people go to mass on Palm Sunday and we hear the story, we hear the agony in the garden and the trial and the crucifixion, and we go to Easter Sunday and we hear about the resurrection, we have the whole story. But I liken it to going to a movie preview in the last 10 minutes of the movie.

So, the movie preview, you've got all the highlights of the action scenes and some of the little tips that say, ooh, something's going to happen and little things that draw you in. And if you go to that last 10 minutes you know how all that resolved. You know who wins you know what relationships developed, you know all kinds of things that wrapped up and you know the finish of it, but you really miss the depth of the story, and when you watch the entire movie it's so much different. And it's the same in Holy Week, we have masses that go from Thursday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday that take us into this story and show us the depth of what Jesus is doing. And part of that are the readings that help us to understand what the background is. So as St. Augustine said, "The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is revealed in the New."

The Passover Lamb

So, in Holy Thursday, we start with the description of the Passover. So, we're going all the way back to Egypt and the Lord tells the Israelites, you will celebrate this in this way. I need you to get a lamb who is perfect. I need you to examine it for four days to make sure it's perfect. And then I need you to sacrifice it and I need you to eat it, all of it. And if you can't eat all of it you

need to find another family to help you. You have to eat all of it. And then you take the blood and you put it on your door and the angel of death will pass over you. You have been marked by the blood of the lamb and that saves the Israelites from death and it frees them from slavery. That is the final plague that gets them out of Egypt. And so that helps us to understand what's happening when Jesus goes to His last supper, which is a Passover meal. And He says, when picks up the bread, "This is my body which will be given up for you."

And we see that Jesus is the lamb of God. We see that he has come into Jerusalem on Sunday, and he has been examined. If you read the gospels, He is questioned, He is challenged. And all of that happens between Sunday and Thursday, four days. And then He comes to this last supper, and He celebrates the Passover with His apostles and He tells them what's happening. He is the lamb of God. He is going to be sacrificed. And the blood of the new covenant is His blood. And for us, that sounds familiar, blood, wine, body, bread. We kind of see that every day. So that seems a bit normal.

A Sacrifice of Communion

But being at that Passover meal with Jesus that would've been really bizarre. If you were saying that I am going to sacrifice myself for you. The thing that symbolizes that most on the table is the lamb. And why would He not point to that? There's something else going on. So, Jesus is the lamb of God. He is perfect. He is going to be sacrificed. But part of that sacrifice of Passover was that you had to consume the lamb. There was something about that sacrifice that was different. It was a sacrifice of communion, you had to be a part of it. You had to consume the body of the one who had been sacrificed for you. That blood was given for you.

And so, if Jesus is the new Passover lamb, He fulfills that in a way that's greater because everything in the Old Testament that points to Jesus and it's pretty much everything that is in the Old Testament, that points to Jesus. Everything in the Old Testament is fulfilled by Him in a greater way. So that lamb that was given up for the Israelites to free them from slavery, to save them from death is now the Lamb of God in Jesus, who freed us from slavery to sin, who frees us from eternal death and gives us eternal life, something greater. So as we consume His body, we're not consuming His body like we would think. He gave us this bread and He told us that this is like the manna.

The Body and Blood of Christ

In John Chapter 6, He says "Your ancestors ate manana in the desert and they died but I am the living bread come down from heaven. And He continues, "That you must eat my body and drink my blood in order to have life within you." Oh, that's kind of shocking. I don't want to eat your body and drink your blood but what does that mean? Well, here is where we find out what that means. My body is in this bread. My body is this bread and that's where we get our understanding of the true presence of Christ in the bread and the wine. That they become the body and the blood of Christ and why we take care of it so reverently, and we must consume it. We must consume it in order to be part of this sacrifice.

And when we have something, for example a toast that falls to the floor we have to consume that, we don't just throw that away because it is the body of Christ. When we have extra blood in the chalice we have to consume that because that is the blood of Christ, we don't just throw that away. It's like that lamb if you don't have enough people to finish it you find enough people to finish it. And so, this is where we get that understanding. That Old Testament is revealed in the new in a much greater way. Manna was already miraculous. It can't point forward to a piece of bread, that's a symbol. That would be the only time in the Bible that anything is pointed forward to something less in Jesus. It has to be something more. And here is where we find it on Holy Thursday.

Adoration

And then at the end of this Holy Thursday liturgy, we don't finish, we are not dismissed. We go to Adoration because at the end of that last supper the apostles in Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. And we go with Jesus in the Eucharist to pray. And in our church we have a procession and we go to a place in our campus that has these beautiful windows looking out into the forest that is around our campus. And it feels like you're in a garden. So, you do feel like you are part of that actual story. And I remember one year as we were going into Adoration, I had been telling my children this story and how they were part of it and how really was trying to reenact some of the things that were happening in each day. And my youngest daughter looked up and said, "So we're going to pray with Jesus?" I said, "Yes." She said, "So are we going to sleep?" I said, "I hope not. We're going to try and do better than the apostles did." But she understood that she was becoming a part of this story and it was beautiful.

And then as I was writing my book "Walking Through Holy Week I realized I had never been to the end of Adoration that night. I had always been at the beginning with the agony, with the blood, the sweat that was like blood dripping from Jesus' face. And I know that I've been in those times of agony saying, "Lord, please take this cup." I know that I've been praying for people in that agony saying, "Lord, please take this cup," and then trying to finish with "Lord, not my will, but yours."

But this year I went, and I took my children and having young children, you don't get to stay very long. So, we stayed as long as we could and then I took them home. I put them to bed, and I went back and that last half hour was so different, it was so different. At the beginning, you're in the agony and you're there with Jesus and comforting Him and being with Him. And at the end, the agony is over. The question has been answered and He knows that He must go. And He says He will. And you know that in a moment, He is going to stand up and go to those apostles and say, "It's time, let us go, my betrayer is at hand," and He never looks back.

The strength in that moment brought me to my knees and I'll never miss it. And then Jesus is taken from our sight just as He was taken from the apostle's sight. And we go back on Good Friday.

Good Friday

And on Good Friday, everything is stripped, everything is bared. The tabernacle is open and empty. The altar is empty. There's nothing on it. And I don't like it, I don't like it. And I'm sure the apostles didn't either. It's this unnerving feeling, where is my Lord? He's hidden from my sight. But in this liturgy of Good Friday, we hear this promise, this hope, these Old Testaments being revealed in the New. And we have a reading from Isaiah that tells us what is happening in this moment. That was written hundreds of years before Jesus is even born. But in this reading from Isaiah we hear that Jesus is doing work that is good. This is a Good Friday and it is taking our sins.

And I'm going to read some of it for you. It's pretty long. So, if you would like to read the entire thing which I highly recommend it's Isaiah 52:13 through Isaiah 53:12. It's unbelievable. So many things, point to what Jesus is doing. Again, revealed in the new. I'm going to read you a couple things and then I really encourage you to read the rest.

So, the first part says, ***"Even as many were amazed at Him so marred was His look beyond human semblance and His appearance beyond that of sons of man. So shall he startle many nations, because of Him, Kings shall stand speechless. For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it."*** And it continues, ***"There was in Him no stately bearing to make us look at Him, nor appearance that would attract us to Him. He was spurned and avoided by people a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity. One of those from whom people hid their faces, spurned, and we held Him in no esteem."***

You know, it was our infirmities He bore, our sufferings, 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. Upon Him was the chastisement that makes us whole. By His stripes, we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way. But the Lord laid upon Him, the guilt of us all."***

This tells us exactly what's happening here. This is Jesus receiving our punishment, our guilt and we are receiving His healing. We are receiving His grace. And if you keep reading, there are just so many things that just say exactly what's happening, again, hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. This was the plan all along and we have been told so that we can understand, it's beautiful.

Venerating the Cross

And as part of this liturgy, we go, and we venerate the cross. Now we know that this is not the true cross and we are not worshiping this cross, but we are a physical people. And again, we become a part of this story when we go to the cross and we touch it or we genuflect, or we kiss it and we remember. This is our way of remembering and becoming present to that cross where Jesus was crucified. We remember and we are present. And one year as I was going up to venerate the cross with my again, youngest daughter she really did not want to go. She understood this on a level that most people didn't especially at her age and she was like "I know what that is. I don't want it, I'm not touching that, I'm not kissing it. I'm not going anywhere near

it," but she didn't want to be away from me, especially with that cross there. But I was going and so we negotiated a little bit in the pew. And as we decided that she would come with me to the first pew and then she would wait. I would go venerate the cross, come back and get her and we would go back to our pew. But by the time I came back to get her, she was so upset that we went outside, and she was absolutely embarrassed that it was so hard for her. But I was able to tell her that that was such a gift because she understood the truth of what that cross meant like nobody else in that room and what a gift to know the power of the sacrifice that was made for you. And I was able to comfort her as young as she was to say that this was a blessing and a gift and that her response was actually appropriate. It's how we all should be. And I know that I come away from that time in tears every year, knowing that what was sacrificed knowing the sacrifice that Jesus gave for me and I am overwhelmed.

Holy Saturday

And we leave that liturgy, again, it is not over, we are not dismissed. We leave in silence, and we leave as the apostles did, waiting. Jesus is dead, He is in the tomb, and we must wait. And on Holy Saturday we return. And it is my favorite mass of the year. My absolute favorite mass of the year. It starts in darkness. We cannot start before sunset and so it starts in darkness and outside is a fire that lights the Paschal candle for the year. And that Paschal candle represents the light of Christ. And it comes into the church, and we all have candles, and we light our candles from that light of Christ and pass it to each other. And we show how the light of Christ can spread from one person to another without dimming the light of any of them. In fact, the light grows, it expands and the soft light that fills that church is stunningly beautiful.

And finally, all the lights come on because the light of Christ has returned. And the reading of this mass are just spectacular. There's a lot of them. This is a really long mass, if you do all of the readings, there's a bunch and it can be a three-to-four-hour mass. But if you understand what these readings are, again that Old Testament, which was being revealed in the new it's telling our entire spiritual history, starting with the creation of the earth and you watch and see, how all of this is fulfilled in Jesus. And finally, you get to the empty tomb. And even the Psalms in between have something to say about all of the readings that you're hearing.

And I love that every year, and this is my mission maybe you can go and help me, I go to the priest, and I beg him, please read all the readings. Please let us do this, this is the one time. And most of my pastors know that I'm coming. And they're like, just don't even we're not doing that many. But we have had some people, some priests who do all of the readings and we love it. In fact, my children, my older ones have had times that they've been at masses that they do all of the readings and everything. And my younger children at home with us that we didn't do so many. And I love that my younger children feel ripped off, they didn't get the whole story. Again, because they know that this is where we hear the whole story, we get all of it.

The Story of Abraham and Isaac

And one of my favorite stories that we hear is the story of Abraham and Isaac. When Abraham has been called to sacrifice his son. And I read this a ton of times growing up I've heard it so many times in church and Bible studies or whatever. And finally, one time I read it and I saw it

and I saw that Abraham walked for three days to Mount Moriah. And when Isaac was carrying the wood for the sacrifice on his shoulder, he was carrying the wood for his sacrifice on his shoulder. And he asked his Father, "Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" and Abraham replies, "God Himself will provide the lamb." This is Jesus. All of this is Jesus, so many things. And as you read through it, you find more and more things that Jesus carried the wood for the sacrifice on His shoulder. That God did provide that lamb and that lamb was stuck in a thicket with his head covered in thorns. It was Jesus. So, reading after reading, after reading tells us, again, exactly what is happening on this day. And it's fantastic. And then all of the new Catholics come in to the church on that day. They are baptized, they're confirmed, they receive their first communion, and the Gloria comes out and the bells are ringing, and Easter is here and we finally are dismissed. The story is complete.

Easter Sunday

And then Easter Sunday, because Holy Saturday is a vigil mass, so you don't have to go to Easter Sunday. But I have a friend one year whose wife had converted and so she had joined the church on Holy Saturday. They had spent all that time. It was very late, probably 11 o'clock at night by that time. And he came to me with his eyes wide and said, Julie wants to go again tomorrow. And he said, I told her we don't have to. And she looked at me and said, "I just received my first communion. Are you going to tell me I can't take my second?" And he said, we're going. So that Easter Sunday is another mass that you get to stay in that place of resurrection, in that joy of Easter and you can receive communion again. You can receive Him in the Eucharist again. And the thing with Easter, as I finished writing this book the Easter services, the Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, the Gospel readings, all tell the story of the resurrection and between all of the years, the cycle A, the cycle B, the cycle C and the different masses, there are eight options that can be read over the over the three-year period. In five of them, Jesus isn't there, it's the empty tomb. And they look and they see, and it stops. And I thought, what is happening? Easter it's over? And I realized Easter is the beginning.

We have just begun the 50 days of Easter and if you have gone through this Holy Week if you have immersed yourself in this story, Easter is overwhelming. And there is so many things, there are so many things that you have received, and you need some time to process it. And the beautiful thing is that we have 50 days of Easter to do just that. I invite you this year to become a part of the story of Holy Week.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray. *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for the longing that you put into our hearts the longing to know you deeper, to receive your Son and for this time of Lent and of Easter and of about gifts that you give to us and the graces that you pour upon us. I ask you Lord to lead everyone who hears these words closer to you. Fill them with your grace. I thank you, Lord for all that you have done for us. And I pray all of this in Jesus' name, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. God bless.*