



# Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion March 20, 2016

## Make Room for Emptiness

By Janel Esker

**B**eing empty is rarely considered a good quality. People who see a glass as half-empty are labeled pessimists. No one gets excited about an empty bank account. And an empty cookie jar is a veritable tragedy. Our culture values fullness—full of friends, full of money, full of food.

Empty just isn't something we strive to be. Yet in today's reading, *empty* is a key

word used by St. Paul to describe Jesus. Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance." The Greek word in this text for emptying is *kenosis*.

We continue to see this kenotic Savior in the Palm Sunday Gospels—first as Mass begins and then in the reading of the passion. Jesus moves from being lauded as a king during his entry into Jerusalem to pouring himself out on the cross just a few days later. He is left without anything to cling to, any fullness to claim—he's empty, which isn't someone or something we'd normally value. But of course, it's in his emptiness that God can do the work of resurrection and new life.

During this Holy Week, we might be busy doing many things—preparing for family visits, shopping for the Easter meal, picking out the perfect Easter dress or suit for our child. Life can be full, and that's very good. But make room in your life for *kenosis*—for emptiness—and for remembering our fully emptied Savior and all he did for us. †

## Sunday Readings

### Luke 19:28–40 (At the Procession)

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

### Isaiah 50:4–7

"I gave my back to those who beat me...my face I did not shield."

### Philippians 2:6–11

"He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave....[H]e humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death."

### Luke 22:14—23:56

"This is your hour, the time for the power of darkness."

## A Word From Pope Francis

**Do not be men and women of sadness:** a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst; it is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life's journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable, and there are so many of them! And in this moment the enemy, the devil, comes, often disguised as an angel, and slyly speaks his word to us. Do not listen to him.



—Palm Sunday homily, March 24, 2013



- How might we model Jesus and empty ourselves for the sake of others?
- What have I done to end violence in the world?

# Agony in the Garden

By Ronald Rolheiser

**T**he agony in the Garden, Christ sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, is one of the great texts in Scripture. You'll find it in Luke 22, Matthew 26, and Mark 14. Many Catholics know it as one of the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. The image has been etched into the Christian psyche. That's because it's a deep moment, one loaded with meaning.

In that moment, the few hours after the Last Supper, Jesus had to prepare for his death. That's a lot of pressure, the kind that brings life sharply into focus. What would you do if you knew you were in your final hours? Better yet, how could that type of insight affect the choices you make between now and then?

The word *agony* is not just a pious term. In Greek, at the time of Jesus, *agonia* was also a technical term for what athletes did warming up for the Olympic Games. During that warm-up, the Greek athletes would produce a certain sweat that warmed up their muscles and readied them for coming combat. That sweat, that lather, was their *agonia*.

Luke's account tells us that Jesus does an *agonia* to warm up, to get ready, for his Passion. It teaches and reminds us that we don't move from being self-pampering to dying on a cross without some preparation. Jesus wasn't a physical athlete, but unlike cinematic portrayals



of the agony and passion, the evangelists don't emphasize the whips, beatings, thorns, blood, and nails. They emphasize that he was alone, betrayed, humiliated, and hung out to dry. Nobody stood up for him. In Mark's Last Supper account, Jesus says he is dreading what's going to happen. He doesn't speak about the ropes and whips and chains. He doesn't say, "You know, I'm really going to get beaten up out there." He says, "You're all going to betray me. I'm going to be alone."

Do you ever wonder why that agony happens in a garden? Gardens don't appear that often in Scripture. In spirituality, gardens are not for flowers or vegetables; gardens are where lovers go. The drama of Christ's agony is a drama of love—a drama that moves deep inside of our loneliness. What's happening in the Garden is a test of love. That's why

Scripture begins in the Garden of Eden. In the garden, you can be naked. In the garden, there's no shame. Where does Mary Magdalene, the great lover in Scripture, find Jesus on Easter morning? In a garden. Jesus is a lover, and he calls us into the Garden.

In Jesus' passion, he gives his life *and* death for us. When blood and water poured out of the crucified Jesus (see John 19:31–37), we see not only a sign of baptism and Eucharist, but also other signs. Blood is the life that flows between us and keeps us alive. Water washes us. The evangelist is saying that Jesus died in such a way that it makes us freer. We're able to live; life flows more easily and freely. That is when we are clean of guilt. †

\* *The full version of this article was published in a 2008 issue of Catholic Update.*

## PRAYER

Lord, your life teaches the way of peace and nonviolence. Help me to imitate your example in times of conflict.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

March 21–26

Mon. Holy Week: Isaiah 42:1–7 / John 12:1–11  
Tue. Holy Week: Isaiah 49:1–6 / John 13:21–33, 36–38  
Wed. Holy Week: Isaiah 50:4–9a / Matthew 26:14–25  
Thu. Holy Thursday: Exodus 12:1–8, 11–14 / 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 / John 13:1–15

Fri. Good Friday: Isaiah 52:13–53:12 / Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9 / John 18:1–19:42  
Sat. Holy Saturday (Easter Vigil): Genesis 1:1–2:2 / Genesis 22:1–18 / Exodus 14:15–15:1 / Isaiah 54:5–14 / Isaiah 55:1–11 / Baruch 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ezekiel 36:16–17a, 18–28 / Romans 6:3–11 / Luke 24:1–12

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