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Living the Paschal Mystery

“Paschal mystery” is the theological term for the death and Resurrection of Christ and the cycle of dying and rising in our own lives.

In his book *Holy Longing*, popular writer Fr. Ronald Rollheiser diagrams the paschal cycle in this way:

1. Good Friday ... “the loss of life—real death”
2. Easter Sunday ... “the reception of new life”
3. The Forty Days ... “a time for readjustment to the new and for grieving the old”
4. Ascension ... “letting go of the old and letting it bless you; the refusal to cling”
5. Pentecost ... “reception of new spirit for the new life that one is already living”

Put into a more colloquial language and stated as a personal, paschal challenge for each of us, one might recast the diagram this way:

1. “Name your deaths.”
2. “Claim your births.”
3. “Grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality.”
4. “Do not cling to the old, let us ascend and give you its blessing.”
5. “Accept the spirit of the life that you are in fact living.”

Fr. Rollheiser adds that **living the Paschal Mystery is the secret to life**. Ultimately, our happiness depends upon our willingness to undergo it. **When we don’t undergo the Paschal Mystery, our lives become stuck in some stage of our lives or in some experience that we are not choosing or willing to move through.** More than anything, the Paschal Mystery applies to the experience of loss: loss of youth, loss of a place we used to live in and now miss, loss of meaningful work or a ministry, loss of a relationship, and loss of health.

Dying to the loss of youth

Applying the principle of the Paschal Mystery to the loss of youth, Ron Rollheiser writes:

Imagine this scenario: You wake up one morning, look at your calendar, and come to the unwelcome realization that it is your seventieth birthday. You are seventy years old! At seventy, in terms of this life, you are no longer a young person—and all the cosmetics, exercise, plastic surgery, tummy tucks, and positive attitude in the world cannot change that. Your youth is dead.

But you are not dead! You look at yourself in the mirror and see there is a very vibrant person despite the physical limitations of age. In fact, you are richer now, full of a deeper life than when you were twenty or forty or sixty. But you are alive as a seventy-year-old, not as a twenty-year-old.

Paschally, in terms of your youth, this is your status: Good Friday has already happened, your youth has died. Resurrection too has happened; you have already received the life of a seventy-year-old. And now you have a choice: you can refuse to grieve and let go of your lost youth and, like Mary Magdalene on Easter morning trying to cling to a Jesus she once knew, try to hold on to your youth. If you do that you will be blocking ascension and you will be an unhappy, fearful, and frustrated seventy-year-old because you will be trying to live your life with someone else’s spirit. A schizophrenic endeavor at best. Pentecost cannot happen for you and you will daily grow more fearful and unhappy about aging.

However, should you let your youth ascend, should you be able to say: “It was good to be twenty, good to be thirty, good to be forty, and fifty, and sixty, but it’s even better to be seventy!”—then Pentecost will happen. You will receive the spirit for the life that you are already in fact living, the life of a seventy-year-old, which is a different spirit than for somebody who is twenty.

Some of the happiest people in the whole world are seventy years old and some of the unhappiest people in the world are that age. The difference is not in who has kept himself or herself in the slimmest and most youthful-looking, but in Pentecost. The happy seventy-year-old is a woman or a man who has received the spirit for someone that age—that spirit which scripture says is given to each of us in a most particular way for each particular circumstance in life.

Reflection Questions

- How would you describe this stage in your life? How well are you coping with it?
- Would you say that this is a happy time in your life? If so, what makes it happy? If not, what is stealing your joy?
- Is there some recent or current loss that you are fending off? What is blocking you from dealing with this painful time?

When it comes to dealing with loss or some painful experience, one of the toughest steps can be the first one: the decision to get started. If you think that I or another staff member could be helpful as you seek to move through a painful time, I would hope that you would contact us and never think that I or they are too busy with more important things.

The Wounds of Love

The following reflection is by Fr. Flor McCarthy, SDB.

There was a man who was very attached to his father, who had been a labourer all his life. When the father died, the son was grief-stricken. As he stood quietly gazing down into the coffin in which he was laid out, he was particularly struck by his father's hands. Even small things can reveal the essence of a person's life. Later he said:

"I will never forget those magnificently weathered old hands. They told the story of a countryman's life in the eloquent language of wrinkles, veins, old scars and new. My father's hands always bore some fresh scratch or cut as adornment, the result of his latest tangle with a scrape of wire, a rusted pipe, a stubborn root. In death they did not disappoint even in that small and valuable particular.

"It is not given to sons to know everything about their fathers, but I have those hands in my memory to supply evidence of the obligations he met, the sweat he gave, the honest deeds he performed. By looking at those hands you could read the better part of the old man's heart."

Jesus said to the apostles: "Look at my hands and feet Touch me and see for yourselves...." He said the same thing to Thomas: "See my wounded hands and side. Cease doubting and believe."

One might have expected the risen body of Jesus to be whole and without blemish. Yet, not only is his body still scarred, but it is those very scars which help the disciples to recognize him. Those scars were the wounds caused by humiliation, torture, and crucifixion. Jesus showed his wounds to the apostles. Why his wounds? Firstly, those wounds show that the risen Jesus is the same person who was crucified. Secondly, because those wounds were the proof of his love.

Those who care about others pick up a lot of wounds as they go through life. Perhaps there are no great wounds but only a multiplicity of little ones—a host of scratches, wrinkles and welts. Yet these are only the visible wounds.

What about the myriad of invisible wounds: the furrows left on the mind and the soul by hardship, worry and anxiety? And those piercing ones which affect that most sensitive part of us—the heart—things like disappointments, ingratitude, betrayal. Emotional hurt hits you in the gut, and can be harder to deal with than physical hurt.

But these wounds are not things to be ashamed of. They are the proof of our love. Will anyone see these wounds and come to believe in our love because of them? Even if no one else sees them, God sees them, and he is

proud of us, for he sees that we resemble his son. We must not look at a person's achievements only, but at his/her wounds and scars.

Jesus didn't hide his wounds for they were the proof of his love. They were the mortal wounds the Good Shepherd suffered in defending his flock from the wolf. He invited the apostles to touch those wounds. It was by touching and being touched that they were healed of their unbelief. His wounds give us hope in our wounds.

Jesus didn't become embittered because of his wounds. Neither should we. Having brought peace and healing to the apostles, Jesus commissioned them to go and bring the good news to others. Jesus wants us to be witnesses to his resurrection. A sad, embittered person is a poor witness.

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Rosary Crusade to save Ireland's pro-life law

Towards the end of next month the people of Ireland will be given the opportunity to vote in favor of keeping a current law that protects the life of the unborn child except when the mother's life is in danger, or a vote to grant unrestricted abortion rights during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. Until now, Ireland is one of the few remaining countries in Europe to preserve a high level of protection for unborn children.

Thousands of faithful Catholics in Ireland (with thousands of Catholics in other parts of the world) have joined together to have Rosary Crusades all over Ireland asking God and our Blessed Mother to touch sufficient hearts to vote to retain the current law that protects the unborn child. The current Irish government and the liberal media are both in favor of changing the current law. Please join the Rosary Crusade and storm heaven for the protection of the unborn in Ireland (and, of course, everywhere). For more information, google "Rosary Crusade in Ireland for the protection of life of the unborn."



Have a blessed week,

Fr. Sean

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