

## Reflection for Palm Sunday

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For each of us, this has been a most unique experience of Lent and approaching Holy Week. We are conscious of the whole world, united in confronting the Covid-19 pandemic, worried about the vulnerable in our families and among our friends, even our own vulnerability, caught in much uncertainty and anxiety. Now, we enter with all of this, into the epic stories of Holy Week. We are faced with suffering, innocent suffering, undeserved pain, death. We approach it in our prayer, our reflections, the news we hear about the sick, the exhausted and worried health care workers, all who are vulnerable. We are surrounded by the suffering. How do we enter into this week in a meaningful way bringing it all together? What is God saying to us at this time?

As Richard Rohr says, "Depth is being forced on us by great suffering, which as I like to say, always leads to great love. But for God to reach us, we have to allow suffering to wound us. ... We have to allow these feelings, and invite God's presence to hold and sustain us in a time of Collective prayer and lament."

As a community of faith, we are people of compassion, we are feeling the suffering of the world. This Holy Week, we are confronted, uniquely, with the suffering of Christ. Christ's body is breaking before us on the TV screens, in hospitals, in cities, in homes around the globe as well as in the scriptures we listen to these days. How do we transform this suffering? Or rather, *how are we, ourselves, transformed through this?*

In the Scriptures there is a book which is titled with the name of an emotion, the Book of Lamentations, Jeremiah's book of Lamentations. It is composed of five laments, a response to a time of crisis in the sixth century before Christ, when the temple was destroyed, the rituals could not be celebrated, the streets of the cities were empty, leaders were scattered, a time of exile. It was imprinted on the hearts of the Jewish people. Every year, to our time, this experience is remembered in a day of fasting and prayer, called Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av.

A few years ago, when I participated in a course in Israel called the *Jewish roots of Jesus and Christianity*, I was in Jerusalem at the time this feast was commemorated in July that year. With the Jewish community, a group of us went to the Western Wall of the Temple in the evening. We sat on a blanket on the ground in small groups and took turns reading and entering into the book of Lamentations in the Scriptures. We remarked among ourselves that Jesus too, would have come to this same place to lament, to remember the suffering of the people, of the community.

This week, we are invited to enter more deeply into the suffering of our lives, our world today, the realities before us, as we again pass through the events of Holy Week. As well, we need to delve into our faith, our belief in the constancy of God's love and power to restore. Laments, as often seen in the Psalms, end with the reminder that God is

setting things right, even though it often seems so slow. It is right for our laments to turn toward a reminder that God is in control and about righting all things made wrong.

Each year, the season of Lent calls us to conversion. How is that happening in us this year? How is our life being transformed? Our suffering and the suffering of our world is in one hand and our response in faith is in the other hand.

The union of grief and unquenchable hope in God's presence within it all will help us to come to a sense of meaning, what our place, our role is in this, now. Our life and our faith come together as one. This is what will lead us to the celebration of the Paschal Mystery.