

## **Sacred Journey: The Need for Holy Week : Keep Awake and Watch With Me**

This Sunday we begin our sacred passage through Holy Week as we mark Jesus' final journey into Jerusalem and we anticipate the tragic events ahead as we encounter Jesus' Passion.

Holy Week has fallen prey to our incessant busy-ness and fewer have time to offer themselves for the full journey. And we sometimes suffer the modern malady of short attention span if a liturgy goes "too long."

An old catechism says the ultimate purpose of human existence is to love and enjoy God forever, but it has become almost habitual to look at our watches or phones during worship. This is sometimes due to a liturgy's failure to live up to the task of enjoying God, but it is also indicative of how hard it is to give ourselves to stillness.

Our minds wander. As a colleague has said, "distractions pull on every side like restless monkeys. We have places to go, things to do. Silence and stillness, essential to an attentive, listening spirituality, are such rare experiences in the daily life of our culture that those modes no longer come easily or naturally. It may require a great deal of time, effort and practice in order to slow down and rest in the presence of the divine gaze."

Abraham Heschel, a great twentieth-century rabbi, once explained why he never made luncheon appointments: it was because he always said his prayers in the morning, and once he began a conversation with God, he could not predict what time it might end, or whether his mortal self would even survive its close encounter with the Holy.

He likely said this with a degree of humor, but his understanding of prayer as a risky encounter with an unpredictable outcome fires my own spiritual imagination. But, I too fear I am more like the uncomprehending disciples in Gethsemane, who could not keep vigil with Jesus for the hour of his deepest agony. "Stay awake with me," he asks them as he goes off to offer his great prayer of self-surrender: Not my will, but yours be done. But when he returns to his friends, he finds them asleep. Three times he goes off to pray, and each time they just fall asleep. Jesus is understanding at first ("The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."), but after the third time his exasperation shows ("Did you get a good rest? You might want to wake up now that the police have arrived."). Their slumbering ways were but one of many betrayals that night. Jesus had to walk that lonesome valley by himself.<sup>[1]</sup>

One of the Holiest weeks in Christendom, Holy week is still so needed and relevant to our lives. Each service, beginning with Palm Sunday, marks a crucial point in how we understand how we too are to follow Jesus as he has asked us to do.

The journey of triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the last supper with his disciples, the day of his death, the long night of Vigil that then bursts forth with new life from the Empty Tomb---each and every step on this journey guides us more fully into what it means to serve Christ still.

As we begin the most important week of the year, we are invited once more to stay awake with Jesus, to keep him company on the Way of the Cross. The wealth of daily rites, particularly the great sequence of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil, embody the mystery of faith in transformative and indelible ways.

By Easter Sunday we will not be the same.

Stay awake with Jesus. Walk the path with Jesus. We cannot fully apprehend the joy and ultimate victory of God's love without taking the entire journey---the journey really is *how we know*.

Faithfully,

Stephanie+

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[1] The Rev. James Simon