

# IGNATIAN REFLECTIONS

[http://www.magisspirituality.org/ignatian\\_reflections/](http://www.magisspirituality.org/ignatian_reflections/)

## HOLY WEEK 2018

BY DEACON RICHARD NICHOLS, S.J.

### PARISH OF SAINT ANTHONY

110 ANCHOR AVENUE • OCEANSIDE NY 11572 • 516-764-0048

## 25 March 2018

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### **PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION**

We tend to consider sacrifice in terms of gains and losses. Another way to think of sacrifice is repurposing. When Jesus and his disciples drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it, you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, 'The Master has need of it and will send it back here at once'" ([Mark 11:1-3](#)).

The owner of the colt lost the use of his own colt for a period of time. That was a loss, and that loss was fit material for a sacrifice of some kind. If sacrifice is seen in terms of gains and losses, then the loss of the colt could be offered in order to gain the divine favor. In terms of repurposing, it could be intuited that the divine will had a higher and nobler purpose for the colt: in this case, to convey the King of Kings into the city of Jerusalem amidst palms and acclamation, in fulfillment of scripture.

If you lose something that is dear to you, you might offer up that loss as a sacrifice to God in order to gain the divine favor. You might also open your mind to the possibility that God has some higher purpose hidden in the inscrutable depths of his providence. You had hoped to control that thing that was dear to you, but now you may choose to cede control of it entirely to someone better than you and more powerful than you, that is, to God, the divine master. There is your sacrifice. "The Master has need of it" ([Mark 11:3](#)).

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### MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Some lights are natural, some are artificial and some are supernatural. Natural lights include celestial objects and lightning and fire. Artificial lights include light bulbs and the screens of electronic devices. Supernatural lights include God and his angels and saints. “The Lord is my light” ([Ps 27:1](#)).

What does it mean to say that “the Lord is my light?” It means first of all an awareness of interior darkness that cannot be dispelled by natural or artificial lights. And what is this darkness? It is the true mystery of every human person. Why else is it that two people can see the same sunset, look at the same stars, and watch the same movie, yet one chooses to do something right while the other chooses to do something wrong? There is a mystery inside every human person, even a person we think we know well, such as ourselves.

From time to time, our interior darkness needs to see the light and to be seen under the light. Hence the importance of sacramental confession. Hence also the importance of *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, which contain some methods of letting the light in to those hidden places. Meanwhile, we must be careful not to prefer darkness to light (cf. [John 3: 19-21](#)). This means preferring natural or artificial light over supernatural light.

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### TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

The motto of the Jesuits is “*ad majorem Dei gloriam*,” “for the greater glory of God.” The idea is that Jesuits should strive for God’s greater glory and also prefer activities that are more conducive to God’s greater glory. But what exactly does God’s greater glory look like, since God is already infinitely and perfectly glorious?

There is a prophecy in the 49<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah that can help us. “You are my servant, he said to me, Israel, through whom I show my glory” (Is 49:3). God’s servants are people *through whom* God’s glory is shown. Unlike God’s enemies, his servants *collaborate* in the showing forth of the divine glory. God’s enemies, willy-nilly, are also vehicles for his glory (Cf. Sir 36:4).

Thus, whether you are sharp or dull, straight or crooked, polished or rough (Cf. Is 49:2), God’s glory will shine forth from you. It is up to you to *collaborate* in that process and to invest some labor in it.

And what does that labor look like? Sometimes it looks like Palm Sunday, sometimes it looks like Holy Thursday, sometimes it looks like Good Friday, sometimes it looks like Holy Saturday, and sometimes it looks like Easter Sunday. This is why the Church asks us to consider the meanings of those days so carefully.

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### WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

When you realize that someone has been lying to you, then you have some problems. Can this person's behavior be changed? How are you to understand statements from this person: past, present and future? And yet, when it is you who are the one telling the lies, then there doesn't seem to be much of a problem at all. On the contrary, at that time it seems like the lies, if anything, are the solutions to the problems.

We all have some schizophrenia about lying. We don't want the lie, except that we also do want the lie. On the contrary, what we really want is the truth, except that we also don't really want the truth. To be saved from this condition, we need more than help. We need salvation from God. "The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, ...Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear" (Is 50:4). We need God's help to express the truth, whether to ourselves or to others. Scripture calls this the well-trained tongue. We need God's help to perceive the truth. Scripture calls this the ear that hears.

The daily practices of the Church include methods meant to sharpen our appreciation for the truth, such as mass and vespers and lauds. These liturgies include great truths that are both spoken and heard, training both the tongue and the ear.

We may participate in these liturgies even if we are deceitful, even if we are caught up in webs of lies, even if we are not paying any attention. These liturgies are means for us to ask God to bless what is good and true in us and to purge from us what is false and evil. God alone has the power to save us.

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### HOLY THURSDAY

On Holy Thursday, Jesus knows that his life on this Earth is about to be ended. With his arrest and execution only hours away, Jesus chooses to spend time with his apostles, eating a sacred meal with them, washing their feet, and praying with them in the garden of Gethsemane.

These are not the actions of man who is weak, scared and powerless. On the contrary, scripture tells us that at this time, Jesus was “fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power” (Jn 13:3). Can such a claim be made for any other man in history? Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Caesar Augustus had vast power, but they had their limits. Unlike Jesus, they did not have “everything” in their power. The astonishing conclusion is that Jesus was more powerful than they were, and the question raised is “what is true power?”

To answer this question, we must look more carefully at the events of Holy Thursday. Jesus spends time with the apostles. He eats a sacred meal with them. He washes their feet. He prays with them in the garden of Gethsemane. By these actions, Jesus is using his supreme power to prepare the apostles for his bloody sacrifice on the cross, and to prepare you for unity with him.

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### **GOOD FRIDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION**

Today is Good Friday, the day we celebrate the crucifixion of our Lord. We call this Friday "good," even though we are celebrating the execution of an innocent man, Jesus of Nazareth. This execution was really a sacrifice by which the Son of God reconciled the world to his Father. That is why this Friday is a good one.

On the cross, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. "See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted" (Is 52:13). God's servant was really prospering on the cross as he was dying, because it was there that he was achieving his purpose, bringing great goodness into the world and redeeming the fallen human race. It was on the cross that Jesus was "raised high and greatly exalted," both literally and figuratively.

Today is a day to take some vacation from our other labors and to raise high the cross of Jesus in our minds, to make the crucifixion a subject for our reflection, conversation and prayer. Here is a question for you to ponder in prayer: why the cross? Many theologians have said that Jesus could have saved us even without the suffering and shame of the cross, so why the cross? Put yourself there atop the hill of Calvary and ask for light to understand what is happening and why, so that you can unite yourself more closely to Jesus and to his Blessed Mother.

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### HOLY SATURDAY

After the body of Our Lord was taken down from the cross, it was “bound with burial cloths” by Joseph of Arimathea ([Jn 19:40](#)). Ten centuries later, a Greek Orthodox bishop named Theophylactus of Ochrida wrote a reflection on this passage that St. Thomas Aquinas selected for inclusion in his great *Catena Aurea*.

“Be therefore a Joseph, and cover Christ’s nakedness, and, not once, but continually by contemplation, embalm Him in your spiritual tomb, cover Him, and mix myrrh and bitter aloes; considering that bitterest sentence of all, ‘Depart, you cursed into everlasting fire.’”

Holy Saturday is a good day for us to accept the advice of Theophylactus. Contemplate Christ’s body and soul. The body was lifeless but incorrupt. It was taken down from the cross, anointed, bound and laid in a new tomb in a nearby garden. The soul of Christ descended into hell for the salvation of some of the souls caught there in everlasting fire.

Today is also a good day to remind ourselves of Christ’s promise that at the last judgment he would utter “the bitterest sentence of all” to those on his left: “Depart, you cursed into the everlasting fire” ([Matt 25:41](#)).