

THOUGHTS FOR LENT

Our 'Passages' Are One with Jesus

By FATHER BENEDICT EHMANN

Each Lent and Holy Week and Easter, it's as if I'd never been away. Each time, I'm back where I began. Past and present become each other's faces. I know what it is. I know Who it is — Jesus, "the same, yesterday and today". Didn't He say, "I am with you always". And so indeed He is, as I have

found Him to be — most of all, each Lent and Holy Week and Easter, now over 70 of them in the bountiful span my gracious God has granted me.

Each year it never fails, that same poignant-tender presence of Him in the beautiful paschal liturgies — the cross of ashes on the brow, the call to penance, the gospel-pilgrimage from

darkness to light, the palms and Hosannas, the Tenebrae laments for the lost Jerusalem and the ruined Temple, the Cenacle in gathering for the first Eucharist, the footwashing, the unveiling of the cross and the piercing Reproaches, the sabbath-day rest in the tomb, the fire struck in the darkness and setting alight the Easter candle and the hundreds of candles the people are holding in the dark church, the wake-service in the deep caverns of the Old Testament, the first Alleluia and the Exodus-song to the Risen Jesus, the water-liturgy and the baptism of the catechumens, and then, at the summit, the Easter banquet of the Lamb of God, who was slain for us, who rose for us, and who now rises in each of us, as we rise in Him.

does, in us His Church, what He lived to do and endure among us in the flesh. Our paschal liturgies are not play-acting. They are not a mimicry that holds us, nor nostalgic reminiscing. But, in them, our Paschal Jesus reproduces, here and now in us who are His Church, the unending Passover of His death and resurrection.

Yes, Jesus' Passover has become our Passover; and this is how it comes about:

... all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death; so that as Christ rose from the dead in the glory of the Father, thus we also might walk in newness of life." We have this from St. Paul in the greatest of his letters (Romans 6: 3-4).

Since Jesus, in our baptism, identifies us with His Passover, and has gathered us up into it so that the "passages" of our life, from birth to death, become one with His, it is our burden, but even more our privilege, to embrace the word of Paul:

"I have been crucified with Christ, but I live — yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Galatians 2: 20).

Are we really awake to all



of this? This is our Christian estate, our heritage. But many of us "distance" ourselves from Jesus. We think of Him as someone far out beyond us. We do not feel His touch within us. Not that He isn't there: after all, we are baptized. It's rather that we are outside of Him, by our forgetfulness, our blindness to the inner light, our deafness to the inner voice. The circle he has drawn contains us; but the circles we draw do not contain Him. Or at least that's the way it seems, only too often.

Him, this year as perhaps never before, in the coming celebration of His passion, death and resurrection?

We will discover, more clearly than ever, that it is our sins He bore, our burdens that He carried. Assisting at the Holy Week liturgies, we plead guilty to the anguish our sins inflicted on Him and accept gratefully and joyfully the healing pardon He won for us.

If only a small number share in the Holy Week liturgies, and the others absent themselves because of other concerns, might not Jesus' words to the healed leper come to mind? "Were not ten made clean? But where are the other nine?" (Luke 17: 17).

Lazarus Rises

By FATHER ALFRED MCBRIDE

A recent best seller entitled *Life after Life* recounts stories of people who apparently died and revived to tell the tale. Most of them speak of some kind of luminous experiences. These interviews with those who have had some kind of brink experience are up-to-date versions of the centuries old attempt to penetrate the barrier between this life and the next. In the Victorian Age, fake spiritualists duped wealthy old ladies into thinking they were talking to "dear old Harry."

The remarkable thing about the Lazarus story is that there is no news from beyond the grave. The biblical account shows no interest in the trip Lazarus took. No one is quoted asking him about the sights and sounds of his journey into the realm of death. Nor is he. Nor has he left us any voluntary account of the event.

It might be fair to conclude that either the journey into the next life held no interest for the people of the times, or that Lazarus had nothing to tell them anyway. The biblical account seems more interested in the hopes of the living than in the haunts of the dead. The Lazarus story is less about the corridors of death and more about the vision of eternal life. The atmosphere of the morgue yields to the faith insight into resurrection.

The crucial distinction is between resuscitation and resurrection. In resuscitation our mortal body returns to life as is. In resurrection we are reborn with a glorified body that is still our original person but mysteriously transformed by God's power. When St. Paul was asked the question about what our glorified, risen persons would look like, he resorted to the image of a seed and a plant. The seed becomes the glorious plant, but the seed

has achieved an extraordinary new existence. There was enough about Christ's Easter body-person that it was eventually recognizable to the Apostles. But there was much that was different about it to the point that the Apostles didn't know him at first.

We should read the Lazarus story for its dual themes of compassion and resurrection. The death of a loved one always causes grief. Jesus knows such sorrow and is not ashamed to cry when he hears the news and sees the grave. Once again God reaches out to share in the total human experience. God mourns. Yet this is not the whole story. If one has a spiritual life now through union with God, this will continue despite death. At death, then, life is changed, not taken away. Union with Christ here means union with him in the resurrection hereafter.

In recent years there has been so much emphasis on the good and fulfilling life here, there is an impression that either there is no afterlife, or else it doesn't mean much. No one who has a spiritual life, a lifelong love affair with God could believe this or bear it. When one excludes Easter and the afterlife from belief then the death knell for all Christian faith has tolled. It ultimately means we are thrown back on our own resources and condemned to catch what we can before the end.

The resuscitation of Lazarus is a sign of the forthcoming resurrection of Christ and a promise of Lazarus' own resurrection after his second death. The momentary reprieve is a stunning miracle to teach us that we need not fear that death is the end of everything. Christ does not free us from dying, but from the threat that there is no more. We will have our Good Friday indeed. But there is a great Easter in our future.

Economics Seminar Offered to Clergy

The everyday problems that lay people face as consumers, producers, investors and employers will become study material for clergymen at a weekend conference in Batavia next month.

"A balanced, factual view of the American economic system" is promised by the sponsors, the College of Continuing Education at Rochester Institute of Technology and the

Economic Education Foundation for Clergy.

The conference, the 14th of its sort in this region, is scheduled for April 9-12 at Batavia's Holiday Inn. People from the world of business, labor and agriculture will respond to presentations by university economists. Details may be obtained from Ms. Terry Cranson at RIT-Continuing Education, 716-475-2141.

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