

Lent... A Season of Hope

Insights in Liturgy

The Lord Of Our Covenant

By Father Benedict Ehmann

In her poem "Christ In the Universe," Alice Meynell says of Jesus, "Of His earth-visiting feet/None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,/The terrible, shameful, frightened, sweet/Heart-shattering secret of His way with us."

We need words like these

when we think about the love-Covenant which God made with our poor human family on this small out-of-the-way planet.

The love-covenant of marriage alters the whole landscape of life for the bridegroom and bride. Now that they are husband and wife, nothing will ever again be the same. Their lives are intertwined. Their sensibilities become more and more attuned, so much so that they become not only "one flesh," but also one mind and heart. The sensitive husband and wife

must always marvel at being so preeminent a choice, each of the other. It was a choice freely made, impelled by love of course, but yet freely made.

In this bridal covenant we see a live, dramatic image of the New Covenant which God made with his people through Jesus, his Son, who bled and died on the Cross for his Bride, the Church. Long before this, in the day of the Old Covenant, God had already called himself the Husband of his people. Look to the prophet Hosea (2: 18, 21) where God speaks of a coming day of deliverance: "On that day says the Lord, she (Israel) shall call me 'My husband'."

will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy." Again in the prophet Isaiah (54:5,6): "He who has become your husband is your Maker; his name is the Lord of hosts. The Lord calls you back, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit."

The New Covenant fulfills and amplifies the Old. The Divine Husband visits his Bride, is seen by her, and speaks to her, in Jesus, the Word-made-flesh. He lays down his life for her, purifying her in the bath of his Blood, so as to present her a glorious Bride, "holy and immaculate, without stain or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27). And he provides a wedding banquet for this nuptial Covenant on the night before he dies, ordering its continuance in his memory, until the day of his return to take his Bride with him to his heavenly home.

How eagerly he begins this wedding in the "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Lk 22:15) Jesus, ready to lay down his life for his Bride, changes the Old into the New Passover in his Blood. God is now irrevocably covenanted with his people, his Church. No matter what the bad, sad, mad meanderings of our

insane world on the slopes of Inferno, God will not cancel this New Covenant. Even more, he cannot; for, to do so would involve the annihilation of Jesus, the unmaking of the Word-made-flesh.

Far from destroying his people because of their continuing sins, God assures us that the New Covenant stands not as a sign of judgement, but of mercy. God always welcomes his repentant people, to embrace them and once again to place the lost Covenant ring upon their finger.

In this great radiance of Covenant theology, how marvelous God himself to us, how suffused with light is his shows love! And how thrilling the Mass becomes to us, when we see it for what it truly is, the Covenant banquet of our Bridegroom, placing before us the Body that was given up and the Blood that was shed, so that we in our time and place, so many centuries later and in our far-away place, may be ingathered into the great sweep of the "new and everlasting Covenant!" And further, how incredibly gracious our God appears to us as we find him so unfailingly ready in the covenanted mercy of the Sacrament of Reconciliation! Is such an

amazing, all-but-incomprehensible love too much for us, too frightening for us? Do we prefer a more cozy and comfortable God?

Graham Greene, in his novel "The Power and the Glory" has his poor hunted priest answer the Communist officer who finally tracks him down and mocks him about the love of God: "God is love. I don't say the heart doesn't feel a taste of it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint pot of ditchwater. We wouldn't recognize that love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us - God's love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn't it, and smashed it, and smashed open graves and set the dead walking in the dark? Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around."

But our Covenant-God says to all of us: "Be not afraid." We needn't run away from so great a Lover. This Holy Week he invites us to the table of his Supper. He wants us to come forward penitently and kiss the cross. And on the Vigil of his Resurrection he gathers us in darkness, to flood us with his Easter light, and to sing the jubilant Covenant-word:

ALLELUIA!

The Open Window

By Father Louis J. Hohman

In Dying We Gain Our Life

When isolated from Easter Sunday, there is such thing as "Good Friday. Unless the two are taken together, neither one makes sense. But when they are taken as a unified whole, they make all the sense in the world, that is, all that makes sense in this world.

And yet the world doesn't find too much sense in Good Friday, and therefore it cannot find any real meaning in Easter Sunday. Or can we reverse that statement: the world finds no real meaning in Easter Sunday, the newness of life, transcended life; and therefore Good Friday is even more absurd.

Absolutely central to Christian doctrine is the rhythm of death to life. Yet it is the one aspect of

Christianity which has not been accepted in any practical or communitarian way. There are individual Christians who the rhythm of Good Friday live and Easter Sunday and there are small pockets of Christian community which life that same rhythm; but there are no large segments of Christianity which really and truly show their belief in the death/life cycle to the point where they live it.

We in the Western world call ourselves a Christian civilization. In terms of living the rhythm of death to life, we are simply not a Christian civilization. To the extent that we refuse to come apart from ourselves as Christ demanded, to the extent that we refuse to hate our life in this world, we cannot qualify as Christian.

And we refuse to hate ourselves in this world precisely to the extent that we accept the life of our disordered instincts — our vanity and pride, our greed, our anger, our lust, our gluttony, our envy and our sloth.

That we are in major part a consumer society in-

credibly more ready to take than to give is ample proof that we have not made our own the reality of the Great Triduum. The idea that the Christian is one who dies to self that he might live, who spends that he might receive more, and who serves that he might reign is given lip service but little more in our ordinary daily lives.

If this sounds pessimistic in the celebration of Good Friday-Easter Sunday 1979 it is not.

For it is precisely when we are our most helpless, when we are most in need and when we are most battered by sin that the Savior pursues us in His never-ending love and brings us back to Himself.

As long as God is for us who can be against us? The victory of Easter Sunday never has been and never will be ours. It is the victory of Jesus Christ, won by His total emptying total love on Calvary and borne witness to in His resurrection of Easter. Our Savior leader has walked the path first and it is He and only He who can give us the power to do the same. That is why this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.

That is why it is a very Good Friday.

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