



Good Friday for the Earth

Good Friday for the Earth and for the poor
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Introduction

The Passion of Christ and Easter morning gospels challenge our faith and our Christian action. They invite us to see the light of Christ in the darkness of the world. With threats heavy upon nature, climate and the future, as well as upon the most vulnerable populations, we are more sensitive to the presence of Creation in the Gospel and consequently to the calls to safeguard the earth. These few meditations are inspired mainly by citations from Matthew's gospel – starting from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to Easter morning -and by our view on the environment.

Wishing you a good meditation,
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for Green Churches
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Meditation 1

Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem-Matthew 21:1-11

"A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road."

Reflection

Jesus enters in Jerusalem sitting on a donkey, an animal that symbolizes humility. The crowd offers him a green path covered with tree branches and clothes placed by ordinary and poor people.

Echoing this Gospel story, in Haiti, a youth movement takes advantage of the beginning of Easter week to do some reforestation, a very concrete action to meet one of the challenges of their country. In the Bible, the tree is a symbol of life. We are becoming more and more aware of the role of trees in the fight against erosion and for carbon capture.

Silence moment.

Meditation 2

The fig tree without fruit -Matthew 21:18-22

"Seeing a fig tree by the road, Jesus came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, "Let there be no fruit from you forever!" Immediately the fig tree withered away."

Reflection

The fig tree without fruit perhaps echoes the vine, the image of the people, referred to in the Book of Isaiah (5:2-10). The prophet emphasizes that the Lord expected it to be upright and loyal. Rather, it will be injustice, passing of the law, cries of distress and disloyalty.

Today, the fruitless fig tree may evoke one of the dramatic situations produced by climate change to populations that depend particularly on the harvesting of fruit trees. Climate specialists broadly point out that droughts will increase in duration and intensity. In Central America, drought corridors are forcing thousands of people, including peasants, to leave their land and embark on the risky journey north.

Silence moment.

Meditation 3

The Two Commandments -Matthew 22:34-40

"The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Reflection

The re-visiting of the two commandments, loving God and loving one's neighbor, on the eve of Jesus' passion, refocuses us on the essential. With the ecological crisis, we must focus on "loving".

An Aboriginal man once said: "The greatest damage done to human beings is to set them in opposition to nature." Dominating and exploiting nature and humans is the basis of the thirst for profit. Loving creation, others and God becomes a call to faithfulness.

Silence moment.

Meditation 4

The Last Supper - Matthew 26:20-35

"Now when evening had come, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples."

Reflection

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians that, in community meetings, "you do not eat the Lord's supper. For each one hastens to take his own meal, so that one is hungry while the other is drunk. " In this way he reminds us of the requirement for justice to be linked to the Eucharist.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a surge in demand for food aid here and around the world. It has highlighted the importance of the food supply chain and the role of workers in this sector. Inequality and hunger in the world have increased.

At the same time, initiatives of community gardens, food forests, and urban agriculture have been initiated by Christian groups, among others, responding to the challenges of accessing healthy food.

Silence moment.

Meditation 5

The Mount of Olives -Matthew 26:30 -56

"When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (...) Jesus began to be sorrowful and severely troubled."

Reflection

As witnesses to Jesus' prayer in the face of death, the thousand-year-old olive trees are among the best known trees thanks to this passage in the Bible. Just before his arrest, Jesus felt sadness and anguish under these olive trees. The plants give companionship, while the disciples are sleeping and cannot watch even one hour with him. How often the trees are a source of healing and even of comfort in certain moments of our lives! Without a doubt, this psalm can inspire our prayer: "I, like a green olive tree in the house of God, count on God's faithfulness forever!" (Ps 52:10).

We cannot ignore the eco-anxiety felt by many, especially young people, about the state of our planet and the increase in climate change. As disciples, we are called to be attentive to this phenomenon even though elements of a way forward are not obvious.

Silence moment.

Meditation 6

Thorns and the reed -Matthew 27:27-29

"They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him..."

Reflection

Humiliated, tortured, Jesus does not respond to insults and mockery. So many voices are silenced in our world! Those of the victims of climate change and those of faith groups and organizations highlighting the rapid decline of biodiversity and the risk of extinction of animal and plant species. Making these voices heard and listened to is an imperative of the Christian faith. What happens to the poor and to Creation is intimately linked. They are two sides of the same coin. As this biblical proverb points out: "He who oppresses the weak shows contempt for the Creator." (Prov. 14, 31)
Silence moment.

Meditation 7

A path of suffering -Matthew 27:31

"When they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him."

Reflection

Jesus, the one who loved the little ones, the poor, the voiceless children, the marginalized women, the handicapped, the peasants, the unemployed, the people in small trades, the crowds without a shepherd, the foreigners, is condemned to death. Jesus, the one who spoke about God with parables inspired by Creation, is condemned to death.

Scientists published a study in 2020 stating that rising temperatures, extreme temperatures and heat waves will increase the global death rate by the end of the century. The elderly, people with fragile health conditions and populations living in the South are the most vulnerable. Without concerted action to limit the rise in temperatures, thousands of lives will be sacrificed because of our indifference.

Silence moment.

Meditation 8

The women of Jerusalem -Luke 23:26-32

"Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. (...) For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

When we look closely at this passage in the Gospel, we see that Jesus uses the image of the green tree and the dead tree. It is a parable inviting action. Jesus tells the women to weep, not over him, but over themselves and their children. He invites them to look at their own situation and that of their children and not to deny that empires exploit everything in their path to establish their authority. The poor, children, women and nature are their first victims.

Dominating the land, exploiting the little ones, violating women and children, crushing workers and peasants, denying the rights of the poorest and of the people, torturing and killing people and nature, "trampling on the dignity of the poor" (Is 3:15), all this is based on the same logic, on the law of the strongest, on growth at all costs and on the power of money. Women committed to the defense of the environment, many of them indigenous, have paid with their lives for the defense of the land and the dignity of people. We pause in memory of Dorothy Stang (Brazil, Amazon, 2005), Katia Martins (Brazil, 2017), Rosane Santiago Silveria (Brazil, 2019), Berta Caceres (Honduras, 2016), Emilsen Manyoma (Colombia, 2017), Leonor Vasquez Pineda (Guatemala, 2017), Cheryl Ananayo (Philippines, 2017), Gloria Capitan (Philippines, 2016), Esther Mwikali (Kenya, 2019) and Mina Teresa (Honduras, 2019). Yes, Daughters of Jerusalem, we weep for you!
Silence moment.

Meditation 9

Simon the farmer - Matthew 27:32

" As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross."

According to the Bible commentary (TOB), Cyrene is "a Greek colony on the North African coast". Simon is settled there. However, he is in Jerusalem at this time, perhaps to celebrate the Passover. The Gospels of Mark and Luke specify that Simon returns from the fields. He is probably a farmer. He is requisitioned to carry the cross.

Today's farmers, men and women, face many challenges. Climate change is one of them. Seventy percent of the world's population depends on them for food. International development organizations, founded by churches and faith groups, have programs to support small family farmers in many parts of the world, particularly in the South.

Silence moment.

Meditation 10

Darkness -Matthew 27:27-31

" Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."

Reflection

The darkness here is reminiscent of that foretold by the words of the prophet Amos: "There will come a day when I will cause the sun to set at noon and darken the earth in the daytime...". (Amos 8, 9).

Today, darkness in broad daylight covers cities because of pollution and air quality deteriorating due to human activity. Smog episodes are more frequent and longer. In the spring of 2020, the slowdown in activity during the containment measures imposed to slow the spread of Covid-19 resulted in lower pollution levels in several major cities around the world. Our behaviors must change to improve air quality.

Silence moment.

Meditation 11

The last breath of Jesus -John 19:30

" Jesus said, "It is finished." He bowed his head, and gave up his spirit."

Reflection

The last breath of Jesus, the dying breath... Jesus gives back his spirit. We cannot help but think of the death of over million people caused by the Covid-19 pandemic for more than a year. Let us also pray for the families and loved ones who have to deal with difficult grief.

Silence moment.

Meditation 12

The earthquake -Matthew 27:51

" The earth quaked and the rocks were split."

Reflection

Confronted by the pandemic, humanity is facing a real health, social, economic and spiritual earthquake. Experts, including theologians, have pointed out that because of the over-exploitation of the earth and creation, we are harming not only the planet but also ourselves. And this pandemic is a manifestation of this. Silence Moment.

Meditation 13

The Faithful -Matthew 27:55 -61

" Many women were there watching from afar, they had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him, among whom was Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple."

Reflection

Those who had followed Jesus from Galilee are at the foot of the cross. In spite of the events, they remain faithful. Joseph of Arimathea lays the body of Jesus in a tomb. They did not abandon Jesus. Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee are afraid, yes, but fear does not paralyze them.

Believers are invited by churches and faith groups to not abandon humanity in the face of the challenges it confronts.

To not abandon the Earth, but to act for the sake of creation.

To not abandon the poor, the vulnerable, the dying and the excluded.

To leave no one behind!

A moment of silence.

Meditation 14

The light of Easter -Matthew 28:1-20

"They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!"

Reflection

On Easter morning, there is a rolled stone, an empty tomb and also a meeting with the Risen One! It is striking to see that the women are active: they go to the tomb, they leave it, they meet the Risen One, they take hold of his feet, and they give the message to the disciples!

Life is stronger than death! There is in our life a mixture of great joy and fear. But this should not prevent us, like the women on Easter morning, from taking to the road.

Like the disciples of old, we are sent on mission. Today's mission includes safeguarding Creation and supporting the victims of climate change.

No doubt Saint Paul in his epistle to the Romans can inspire our Christian action: ***Creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons and daughters of God.***

Moment of silence.

Bible : World English Bible