

Holy Week: The Triumph of the Spirit of Cain

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

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For Christians, Holy Week is the most meaningful and most significant week of the liturgical year—most meaningful and significant because the events of that week actually took place some two thousand years ago, and most meaningful and significant because they are every year somewhat liturgically remembered. But for the vast majority of people alive during that week two thousand years ago—or, indeed, for most living during any Holy Week since then—it is just another week, no different from any week before or after: Just another week filled with births and deaths, joys and tears, hopes and fears, loves and hates, mercy and violence, quiet and not so quiet desperation, empathy and enmity.

The primal spiritual encounter of Holy Week—between Satan and God, evil and good, the lie and the truth, death and life, total destruction and total salvation—takes place on the historical plane as an encounter between violence and nonviolence, violent hate and nonviolent love, violent justice and nonviolent righteousness, violent retribution and nonviolent forgiveness, violent mercilessness and nonviolent mercy, violent wounding and nonviolent healing, violent power and the power of nonviolence, violent holy men and a nonviolent Holy Man, violent people and a nonviolent person, the violence of the secular and the religious kingdoms of this world and the nonviolence of the Kingdom of God, the violent Prince of this world and the nonviolent Prince of Peace, violent monotheism and nonviolent monotheism, the violent Cain and the nonviolent Christ, the violent sword and the nonviolent cross. Jesus does not suffer and die quietly, in bed, from medical problems associated with old age—and there must be a reason in the Redemptive Plan of God through Jesus Christ for this.

Holy Week is situated and saturated in a life-and-death battle between violence and nonviolence. Take the violence of humanly planned and executed torture and murder out of Holy Week, and there is no Holy Week. Take Jesus' Nonviolent Love of all, of enemies and of friends, of His torturers and of His murderers, out of Holy Week and there is no Holy Week. If we do not choose to accept His Word as He communicates it, then we have no access to authentic revelation, which means we have no access to its power and wisdom.

So why do bishops, priests, ministers, and pastors refuse—almost universally, and almost universally in the spirit of willful obstinacy—to talk about, much less focus on, nonviolence, or its derivatives, e.g., nonviolent love, in their sermons about Holy Week during Holy Week? Is it for the same reason that they have reduced the torture and murder of Jesus to the mere words “*suffered and died*” in their Eucharistic Prayers? The same reason that they selectively forget to include Jesus’

response of Nonviolent Love towards His torturers and murderers in those same prayers?

Is it for the same reason that the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are employed as the two fundamental public creeds of their Churches—two restatements of individual and communal beliefs that fail utterly to mention Christ's Way of nonviolent love of friends and enemies? Why is it that these Creeds jump, non-stop, from the cradle to the crucifixion, ignoring the crucial revelation and teaching of the nonviolent love of all—always—which is the will of the Father done in heaven that Jesus comes to proclaim, by word and deed, must be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6 27-36; Mt 6:10; Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2822).

“[B]orn of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried,” reads the Apostles' Creed. *“He came down from heaven, and by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, died and was buried,”* reads the Nicene Creed. Is it a matter of ‘out of sight, out of mind,’ in order to leave unquestioned and unquestionable the *status quo* which is already in view and in the mind?

Nowhere did the authors of these Creeds deem it necessary or worthy of mention that Jesus did not just die. He was **murdered**. An act of violence was responsible for His death—that's what the word murder communicates. Murdered means someone is intentionally killed by another person or persons. In this case, Jesus was intentionally killed by the violent religious and political rulers of His time and place, and by people who accepted to live in their spirit and according to their direction. Jesus is a victim of religious and state violence. More precisely, He is a victim of those human beings—whether they be a Pilate or a Caiaphas, a soldier or an armed servant—who buy into the violence and enmity justifying myths of a religion and/or of a state. Jesus came to free every human being and all humanity from being enslaved by the hypnotic spell of these mythical, non-existent, idolatrous, hideous and hellish gods of violence and enmity made in the image and likeness of fallen man. He accomplished this Divine Task by revealing in His words, and deeds, life and death, the true image of God, namely, God as *Father of all*, God as Nonviolent Love (*Agape*) of all—always.

Is it even rational to believe that the manner of Jesus' death and the Spirit in which He dies are irrelevant to the salvific truth and saving grace that God desires to communicate about Himself, His Will and His Way to humanity through Jesus? Is it possible to honestly hold that Jesus' steadfast response to violence—nonviolent love, and nothing else—demonstrated throughout His entire ordeal during Holy Week, is not essentially significant? That it does not reveal to humanity the knowledge of the power that saves from every form of evil and death, including, most pointedly, all species of violence and enmity?

As of Saturday of Holy Week, the spirit that seduced and possessed Cain has triumphed, as it has triumphed throughout all of human history. As of Saturday,

Holy Week is just another week glutted, at every point of longitude and latitude on this planet, with anonymous, countless victims of violence, largely forgotten, except in the hearts of those who loved them, where the memories often become the motivation for perpetuating that same violence. As of Saturday of Holy Week—violence rules.

As of Saturday of Holy Week, nonviolence and the nonviolent love of all, even lethal enemies, are again incontestably verified by the world as an express ticket to the grave and to doormat status in history. Nonviolence can speak the truth with love—as Jesus did—to those who live by the power of violence, and those who live by the power of violence can snuff out that word out like a bug—as Jesus was—if that is what they want to do.

There is nothing in the torture and murder of the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels during Holy Week to suggest that He intended harm, in the short, medium or long-term, to anyone, including His lethal enemies. His steadfast nonviolent love toward both betraying friends and murderous enemies has no motive other than the intention to do the Will of the Father in heaven, to which Jesus wholeheartedly desires to be faithful. He knows that the Will of the Father is that all human beings be saved, and He knows the means by which they will be saved. On earth Jesus loves (*agapé*) as He knows the Father in heaven loves (*agapé*), because He knows this love (*agapé*) is the Will of the Father that must be faithfully and ceaselessly incarnated on earth in order to release the power—the only power—that can save each and all. He knows this love must be made visible by living it, so that each and all can imitate it (His *new commandment*), not only because it is the Way to Eternal Life but also because that Way—the Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies is the Way to participate in the Eternal Life of God “*who is love*” (*agapé*), here and now.

If ever there was a moment when we could see what the Love of God looks like, if ever there was a moment when we could see the Way of “*God who is love*” in action in the flesh, if ever there was a moment to clarify and solidify for ourselves what the imitation of Christ entails, what Jesus’ *new commandment—Love one another as I have loved you*—means and calls for, prescribes and proscribes, Holy Week is that moment *par excellence*.

But, if we do not remember Holy Week accurately, if we do not remember the torture and murder of Jesus accurately, if we do not remember that the historical battle two thousand years ago was the battle between the evil of violence and the Nonviolent Love of all, at all times and under all circumstances, then to that extent we will be unable to follow Him properly, ‘to love one another as He loves us’ correctly. A fuzzy, euphemistic by omission, emaciated, watered-down, poorly articulated remembrance, whether during Holy Week or during the *anamnesis* narrative of the Eucharistic Prayer recited every week, results in the loss of grace otherwise available to a person, to a Christian community, and to all humanity through Jesus’ sacrifice of self—an act of self-sacrifice that made the invisible love

(*agapé*) of God supremely visible to human beings trapped in the impenetrable spiritual darkness of disordered desires and passions.

Jesus is indeed a sacrificial victim, but not of some blood-thirsty God who demands His ounce of blood down to the very last drop to avenge a wrong done to him, before he will forgive. He is a victim of violence, of humanity's uninterrupted history of, and nurturing in, violence. He is a victim of individual human beings living in and out of the spirit of violence. But He is a victim of that violence *precisely because* He refuses it. He knows it and calls it what it is: lie, sin, the means and method of Satan, never an activity of God. He refuses to stop loving the violent ones as their *Father in heaven* loves them. He refuses the option of violence and chooses instead the option of Nonviolent Love because He knows that only choosing the Way of God—*agapé*—can impart to those murdering Him, and to all humanity, the gift of the very Life of God—that same Divine Nonviolent *Agapé*—that can save them, and everyone, from falling forever into an eternally inescapable black hole.

Jesus is a sacrificial victim to human violence and for human beings because He chooses nonviolent love of all—even lethal enemies—as His option to confront violence, in order to reveal to humanity the only Way out of the wickedness and snares of otherwise unconquerable evil. The sacrifice of Jesus is a sacrifice of Love.

But as of Saturday of Holy Week, the book on Jesus' life has been closed by the victorious violent ones. It is now entombed, seemingly forever, in the bowels of the earth, together with all the books on all the lives of all the billions of victims of violence—never to be read by anyone. And as far as His opening the gateway to salvation for all humanity, well, He couldn't even save Himself, could He? His unrealistic, impractical, foolish, idealistic Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies was powerless before the power of violence. Wasn't it? It bit the dust and, as of Saturday of Holy Week, was returning to dust. As of Saturday of Holy Week, the power that Cain released into the human condition continued to reign in human existence—with no way out even imaginable. The law of violence and its seed—fear—and its most destructive fruit—also fear—simply continue to rule human life, as they have done from time beyond recorded memory.

Station XII: Jesus Dies on the Cross

“Consummatum est.” The death rattles, the open eyes, the limp, heavy, breathless body, this is how it ends, on a small piece of dirt on a small planet in a small solar system, which is only one of a hundred billion solar systems in a small galaxy, which is only one of billions of galaxies in the known universe. On this little space, life, personality, and possibility expire.

Hydrogen continues to turn into helium on the sun; people in China and Finland and Angola go about their business; microscopic life eats microscopic life in a drop of water; politicians and their moneyed friends continue to connive as usual; fear

seizes the hearts of millions; romance fills the hearts of millions of others; boredom and fatigue empty the hearts of billions; meals are cooked and eaten; dreams are dreamt; revenge is planned; games are played and tens of thousands are buried each day. All this and more continues to happen oblivious to the fact that a person has just freely chosen to give up His life on the cross of nonviolent love. Does anyone know? Does anyone care? Was it worth it? Was it really the right course? What difference does it make?" (*Stations of the Cross of Nonviolent Love*)

So ends Holy Week. Another in the succession of unending unholy weeks of violence has concluded. A life of Nonviolent Love, the life of a human being who believed that through living this Way He was being unreservedly faithful to the will of God and serving humanity has also come to an end. The results: another week of total triumph for the spirit of Cain.

—EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY