

## Living the Spirit Sadness in Lent

Last time I wrote of the joy of Lent. In this writing I have decided to meditate on its opposite, the sadness we may experience during this special season. I am not thinking here of the sadness that comes naturally from so many circumstances of our life. Clearly this sadness is normal and to be expected. Consider how Jesus wept at the thought of the death of Lazarus, his friend. How often do the Psalms speak in one way or another of the sadness that comes so naturally in one's life. Recall how much did David weep over the death of Absalom his son.

If we read the Bible and find in it only a kind of natural sadness which is a part of life, we may fail to discern its teaching about the sadness that derives from sin. That spiritual sadness cannot be denied by the faithful Christian. We have known it. Yet we know how in our inner being we want to be free of sin, of any lessening of our close relationship with a loving God, worthy of being loved in turn. We desire to be rid of that sadness of soul that comes from our waywardness.

Recourse to a book often cited before, *Biblical Theology*, comes to my rescue as I write this. There I read that "joy is bound in salvation and the presence of God. Inversely sadness is the bitter fruit of sin which separates us from God." I found there how many are the causes of sadness found in the Scriptures. Sadness comes from "a trial in which God hides His face, a deceptively wicked spouse, a badly reared son, a traitorous friend, one's own folly, another's slander or perversity." The Bible "discloses sin as the true cause of man's immense misery."

At the same time we can discover how there is also a consolation that is not forgotten. Indeed, salvation comes when we are no longer separated from God by sin. How many times we feel this consolation after our confession! Even as we think of sadness, we must not forget forgiveness and mercy as realities in the life of the faithful. How could it be otherwise, since we have come to know God as merciful? Heartbreak does not kill hope. It calls to the Savior who wills not the death but the life of the sinner. Throughout the Exodus of the chosen people Israel had a glimmering hope that one day sadness will cease forever. This hope continued in Old Testament times.

The New Testament clearly reveals the sadness of Christ. Not only at the death of Lazarus, but at the unawareness of Jerusalem at the hour of its visitation. One cannot fully describe the terrible sadness that Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yet on the Cross Jesus gives himself to the sadness which can conquer all sadness, and open for us a way to the joy that awaits us in faith and hope. We too can conquer sadness by allowing a loving God to heal our weakness of spirit and find mercy in His forgiveness.

There is more to a reflection on the theme of sadness and Jesus. Not only did He suffer sadness, but He knew His followers would also experience it. In the Beatitude He told us that those who weep will receive consolation. Joy will be born from sadness. At the Last Supper He tells His followers that they will weep at his leaving. But He adds that their sadness will be turned into joy. That promise is already fulfilled in our own lives. For those who have faith, worldly sadness at the lack of God's presence in life has been turned into joy. In many ways He comes to us. There is joy when sins are forgiven. There is joy in our communion with Jesus in the Eucharist. Is it not true that at least in some small way we know that nothing can separate us who believe from the love of God?

## Nearly Over

For some days now I have thought about what to write for this Fifth Sunday of Lent. I had a bit of writer's block. Then after a prayer or two asking the Holy Spirit to unblock the fount of inspiration, I began to think about two words: "**nearly over.**" Yes, Lent is nearly over, since next week brings us to the great Triduum of the Passion and Death of Christ.

When we find ourselves thinking of those two words we must recognize that we have various emotions that bring us to wish an event nearly over. We are sad when good things seem to be coming to an end. As one grows old – at least very old – one feels that life is nearly over. Many good things of this life are coming to an end. One can be sad as one loses his or her independence and finds a kind of loneliness.

I confess that as a child I wanted Lent to be over about this time. I began to look forward to Easter. I could hardly wait for the good things about to come. One got new clothes at Easter. Children looked forward to the return of candy. Adults looked forward to a return to normal meals, except for Fridays. [The fasting laws were very strict in those days.] Yet as I grew older I began to realize that a part of Lent was nearly over only in order to lead into a deeper experience of the meaning for its observance.

### The Cross

In Holy Week we will begin to experience something of the sadness which can be life-giving to the spirit. We will look to the Cross and find it more than a symbol. We will salute the Savior praying: "*We adore you, O Christ and we praise you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*" We will reverence the Cross on Good Friday publicly acknowledging that by Christ's Cross we have been saved. In the mystery of the Cross we will find our sadness giving way to something joyful. And that is exactly what the Lord wants us to find as we travel through the last days of Lent, as we travel through life.

Perhaps in this time we may think a bit more about what it means when we make the Sign of the Cross as we say our prayers. Maybe we will feel no shame or embarrassment as we do so even in a public space. In our private moments we will think how blessed we are to be able to acknowledge God's very name. We will remind ourselves that our God is our Father, and think of how merciful He is. We will realize how grateful we must be to the Son, Jesus who has suffered for us and redeemed the whole world from its sinfulness [if we allow ourselves to let Him do so for us]. We will realize that our life is to be a life in and with the Spirit, who is our advocate and the consoler of our sadness.

There is a beautiful spiritual that asks the question: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord; were you there when they hanged Him on a tree?" I hope you know that you were there -- in the mind of Christ, Who offered Himself as a ransom for you. In this Year of Mercy, as we try so hard to bring mercy to others, let us not forget that we have received mercy for ourselves. And so let us pray our thanks: **We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, for by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world!**

*God love and bless you always!  
Monsignor David Morrison*