

Love your  
neighbor  
as yourself

Jesus



I want to  
accustom  
all the  
inhabitants  
...to look on me  
as their brother

*Bl. Charles de  
Foucauld*

March 2016

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,

I pray you are well! Yes, it's been too long since I've sent out a newsletter. I know that time does not speed up as we get older, but it often feels that way. We are now at the beginning of Holy Week, the most solemn and greatest week of the liturgical year. I hope your Lent has been illuminating.

I am more than halfway finished with the 2-year graduate program at the Avila Institute. I am taking 2 classes this quarter, have a long retreat this summer (at Clear Creek Monastery in Oklahoma), and 2 final classes. God willing, my next step is to take the 2-year program on Spiritual Mentorship with the Apostles of the Interior Life.

Otherwise, everything is going very well here. I am still working for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This year I've been teaching the 11<sup>th</sup> grade Confirmation Class at St. James Parish in Gulfport. They've been a true blessing for me, and have been a (very patient) outlet for my need to offer spiritual formation to others.

The meditation in this newsletter is for Holy Week – may we not fear to descend with Christ into the tomb so that we may rise with him in his Resurrection.

God's peace be yours,

Matthew

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Prayers are needed and appreciated!  
(no postal fee required)

“But he passed through the midst of them, and so went on his way.”

*The Gospel of St. Luke 4:30*



*The Procession to Calvary, Peter Bruegel the Elder - 1564*

(high resolution image at [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_d.\\_%C3%84.\\_007.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Pieter_Bruegel_d._%C3%84._007.jpg))

The gospel passage above from St. Luke occurs at the end of Jesus’s confrontation in the synagogue of Nazareth, where he had stated that no prophet is welcome in his hometown. The people in the synagogue had sought to hurl him off of the hill, but he “passed through the midst of them, and so went on his way.”

In the above painting by Peter Bruegel the Elder, we see a mass of people and activity. Animals are running freely, people are chatting and carrying possessions on their heads or backs, children seem to be playing. There is an atmosphere of festival, but a closer look reveals dark undertones. Crows are in the sky and darkness hangs in the distance to the right. Wheels in the air carry the remains of prior executions. A skull in the lower right is near three people who do not share in the festive mood. A closer look near the middle of the painting shows its theme – Christ is carrying his cross to Calvary.

Brueghel's genius was to set the crucifixion in his contemporary time. Public executions were more like carnivals than scenes of horror, and large crowds came to watch. For many, the execution of the criminal was more an excuse to enjoy themselves than to be an object lesson for society. By setting God carrying his cross in a place of insignificance, setting his ashen mother off to the side, setting the redemptive location of Golgotha in the far, obscured distance, perhaps Brueghel is saying something about our own reaction to Christ.

Because God's works are efficacious for all time and exist outside of time in eternity, the liturgical time of Holy Week is not just a remembrance or commemoration of events that happened in the dusty past. Through faith, we enter in to the events themselves – that is why the Mass actually brings us to Jesus's sacrifice on Calvary, not as if he were sacrificed again and again, but so that we might enter into that event that rings forth for all time.

This Holy Week, the world will continue its riotous path as if nothing is happening. Wednesday evening, Judas will betray his Lord for the price of a slave, and the world will be indifferent. Thursday, Jesus celebrates the Last Supper with his disciples, suffers the extremes of agony at Gethsemane, and spends the night alone in prison, and the world will be indifferent. Friday, he dies on his cross, and the world will be indifferent. He sleeps in the tomb, tears asunder the gates of Hell, and rises triumphant, and the world will be indifferent.

I beg you, do not think I write these things from some position of superiority. I look within myself, and I see indifference. I get caught up in my own concerns and business, not noticing that Jesus passes through the midst of them. Jesus passes through the midst of my joys and my sufferings, and I barely look up to see that bloodied man carrying a cross off in the distance. Though I am indifferent, he still "goes on his way" to the cross for me, for he loves me. Each Lent is a time to identify and seek to root out those places within our hearts that keep us indifferent to our salvation so that we might, once again, witness the events of Holy Week in a new way. But this is not something that we can achieve on our own. We must recognize the indifference, but God must heal it. I pray that we all might be fearless enough to surrender to God's desire to heal any indifference we might have to what he is about to do, so that this Easter we are truly witnessing his victory over death in a new, vivid way.

A very Holy Week and Triumphant Easter to you and yours!