

## **A LENT TO REMEMBER, A “SELF” TO FORGET**

Easter season became very personal this year, very personal indeed. The Lenten experience that can lead each of us to our own personal Easter awakening can be a function of our own ideas or the result of an Ideal that strips away and dissolves anything and everything that is unlike Itself. Walking with Jesus can become walking in Christ when our lower bodies and human egos become silent, giving up the need to control and allowing the Wisdom beyond our own to command an experience of crucifixion and resurrection through us. If I had known, in my mind, what I was letting myself in for this Easter season, I would have likely put it aside by giving up meat, sugar, or something similar as a Lenten practice.

While Lent has its roots in a very esoteric, even mystical Truth Ideal, it is most often practiced symbolically, as an idea. If we really want to feel and experience the Truth-Substance possible in this “practice” we should consider realizing and revealing this Ideal as it was accomplished during the first True Lent, the journey that Jesus Himself made to Golgotha on the Via Dolorosa. On a very vital, intimate and personal level, Jesus laid out a roadmap, a template, as to how and why each of us can lay down our lives and take up new ones, just as He did.

The journey actually begins in the Garden of Gethsemane. The pivotal statement that He makes three times there is one that each of us will make in some form to open the door into a True Lenten experience: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” (Matt. 26:39) In this statement, Jesus makes it clear that what we give up for Lent is not something that we are to choose from our own human consciousness and sensibilities, but it is something that we are to surrender to and accept. At the outset of a True Lenten journey, “what the Father wilt” is likely some attachment, regimen of thought, illusion or personal doctrine that we are not fully conscious of or too terrified to genuinely examine. The “self” that we have layered and wrapped around our True Self over many earthly lifetimes can only be dissolved

or transformed by a “Father that knows what things we have need of before we even ask.” (Matt. 6:8) This statement by Jesus Christ truly is a double-edged sword for us as, while describing the incalculable blessings available to us and all mankind, it also describes the errors, illusions and “lies from the beginning” that must be crucified in order to accept and fulfill those blessings.

As Jesus found, not everyone is prepared to make a journey such as the one He made during that fateful time that we now call Passion Week. Matt. 6:40 tells us that, after praying in the garden, Jesus “cometh unto the disciples and findeth them asleep.” Out of the guilt and shame that so often attend our human personalities, it becomes all too easy to choose physical, emotional and mental “sleep” to avoid what Jesus had found the strength to surrender into. I cannot imagine that there are any of us that WANT to make these journeys. They can be difficult, scary, exhausting, and full of suffering, sadness and confusion. They can become the genesis of statements such as the one Jesus made from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:47) During my own recent Lenten journey, what kept me “alive” was the reliance on the “Comforter and the Counselor” promised by Christ in Jn. 14:26. My conscious reliance on this Divine Promise operated in me at a level I had never previously experienced. Without the example He set on the Via Dolorosa, the Holy Ghost memory that lives in each of us, as well as the enduring expectation of resurrection, I honestly do not know what would have become of me.

What I do know with absolute certainty is that the journey I made was not about punishment, not about judgement, and not about the “settling of accounts” in the spiritual sense. What it was about was an expression of God’s Love so immense and powerful that it was beyond my understanding but, gratefully, not beyond my ability to accept and embrace. If we insist that “this cup be taken from me” without surrendering to “not as I will but as Thou wilt,” we remain asleep, unaware of the Kingdom of Heaven that is always at hand. When we are willing, genuinely willing, to look into the journey of restoration that Jesus made, His statement “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23) takes on a rich, purposeful and vital new meaning.

Activated by His initial surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus own journey begins with a cacophony of earthly judgement and accusations. First from the pharisees, then by the “higher” authorities of Roman law, Jesus is pushed and pulled by the structures, dogmas and hidden agendas of men. Who among us have not felt that pushing, pulling and manipulation in our own daily lives? Often, these judgements and accusations come from within our own psyches, what we consider our own shortfalls and imperfections. Everywhere we look and in everything we hear we find laws, rules, mandates, ideas and opinions disguised as Truth, but bearing only facts. That which we embrace, absorb and integrate becomes part of our earthly identity, our persona, and the “clothing” that we wear over our True Identity. It is this raiment of error that authentic Lenten journey is meant to remove, and what a journey that can be!

Over time, over lifetimes, we assimilate like a virus all of the external influences, illusions and errors so bound up in the world. Jesus illustrates this during the next step on His journey: the scourging and the wearing of a thorny crown. Because of the earth-bound illusion of duality, ideas take the place of Ideal in our minds and in our thinking. It is our own earthly ideas that scourge and torment us because they are no longer united to the Absolute, dwelling in a dream-world of potential opposites. Mentally, a crown of thorns is laid upon our heads, the very seat of our thinking. Removed from our native union with Immortal Mind Presence, our own thoughts and ideas can produce doubt, fear and insecurities of every kind. The million pinpricks of our own thorny crown cause the human blood of a thousand generations to run into our eyes, blinding us to the Truth that is “nearer than hands and feet” as Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote.

Just as Jesus did, each of us that have heeded His message groan under the weight of the Lenten cross that has been given us to bear. With us, as it was for Him, is that inner certainty, that Passion, the promise of Freedom, resurrection and restoration at the end of our journey. What appears in the world to be suffering is transformed into the Power of Divine Intention at work in us. What appears in the world to be exhaustion and desperation is the surrender of “me”-ness into the glory of “I”-ness. What appears in the world to be grief and

sadness is simply the funeral pyre of what SEEMS exposing, for all time, what IS. This is the Mystical journey of Lent, the journey Jesus Christ invites all of us to take fearlessly and with the full expectation of Christ living in our being, the exposure of our True Names. The cross we bear is an incredible burden...until it is not. Only the elegant, inexhaustible power of God's Love can facilitate this transformation, but - only and always - as we are willing to accept what is so freely given.

One important quality of this journey to bear in mind is that we are always given exactly what we need to complete it. Again, the journey Jesus made is the great example. Heavy-burdened by His own cross, a stranger emerges from the crowd lining the street to help Him. "And he was compelled, one Simon of Cyrene, who passed by, coming out of the country, to bear His cross." (Mk.15:21) Later in His trek (as recorded in some of the orthodox traditions) a woman named Veronica came forth from the crowd to offer Jesus water and a cloth to wipe His brow, stained by sweat and blood. I too found this to be true along my own Lenten path. Each and every time I felt too heavily burdened, be it physically, mentally or emotionally, some subtle but profound miracle would occur to keep me steadfast and moving forward. For me, this was further certification that, while I was not having the experience that I might want, I was doing and experiencing what I ought.

It is at this point in our Lenten journey, as it was for Jesus, that we ascend to the hill, our own personal Golgotha. Here, the cross we bear is no longer a burden but a blessing, a threshold and a way Home. The cross we bear here is nothing short of the intersection between Heaven and earth. Viewed with our human eyes, the idea of crucifixion can be horrifying and terrible. Viewed through our Christ-eyes, we only lay down and give up illusion and shadow so that Truth can live fully in us. On the cross of a True Lent, our lower bodies (physical, mental, emotional) can be dissolved and transformed, revealing our Truth Bodies (Spirit, Wisdom, Passion). When we do this willingly, we stand with Him in the declaration "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again. This commandment I have received from my Father." (Jn. 10:18)

The greatest impediment to a True Lenten experience is the fear that we will “die,” that our “life” will be taken from us. It is that fear that brings the struggle, brings the suffering and brings the exhaustion and anguish attendant with many a Lenten journey. As Jesus demonstrated on the cross, nothing Real, nothing of Substance and nothing True is ever lost, or ever withheld, nor can it be. What we leave at the cross is what and who we thought we were. What we are resurrected into, time after time, is the Truth and Freedom that has been our Divine Birthright from the beginning.

Coming down from our cross, having surrendered resistance, given up our errors, and dissolved the shadows of duality we so desperately clung to, we can declare, as Jesus did, “It is finished” (Jn. 18:30). A crucifixion, the climax of a True Lenten experience, frees us from the pull of the earth, the “gravity” of the relative. Like Jesus, we do this not only for ourselves, but for all of those we serve and for all life. The spiritual “blood” that we shed enters the earth-bound consciousness and mystically transforms all of creation in some way.

The transformation facilitating this blessed miracle culminates in the final stop on our Lenten journey, the tomb. The tomb is a final resting place, to be sure, but only for that which we have laid down willingly during our journey of “unearthing” ourselves. As the stone rolls across the entrance to this portal of new Life, the world is shut out and that which is of the world is quieted forever, relegated to its proper place. This is a tomb unlike any other, “a new sepulcher wherein was never man yet laid.” (Jn. 19:41)

When the stone is rolled away from this tomb, we see the Light, but more importantly, we set our gaze upon the Source of the Light. It is here that we expose the Holy Ghost Presence in the same way Jesus did. The memory of Truth, present in every sentient being, can be aroused by the witness and testimony we proclaim by our own, individual and conscious journey. With the actual experience of Truth indelibly etched in our being, those with the “ears to hear and the eyes to see” can sense the clarion call to restoration by this transmission of Holy Ghost Presence. Because of that journey of surrender and willingness that

Jesus made and that we may follow, all of the earth becomes resurrected and free, the New Jerusalem revealed forevermore.