

See God's love during Holy Week

Holy Week is at hand. How can we look at this holiest of times in a new way?

The old prospectors used to say: "Gold is where you find it!" I struck gold in Pennsylvania.

Let me give some background.

Recently, I gave a parish mission at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. It's a large parish with dedicated Priests, Religious, and Laity. So much good work goes on all around us, largely unnoticed and uncelebrated. I just wanted to note it in passing.

While at the parish, I had some free time to wander through the town. Specifically, I went to the The James A. Michener Art Museum. I got no farther than the entrance. In the courtyard outside the museum was a bronze sculpture with a poem engraved on it, written by Raymond Granville Barger.

The museum had formerly been a prison. The first two sentences of the poem captured that: "Once these strong walls contained breakers of laws". Holy Week notes that Jesus was held as a prisoner, as a lawbreaker.

What caught my attention, however, was the fourth stanza:

"Word war eliminate.

Then cast out the word hate.

Let the unborn be allowed to live.

This message to all transmitted.

Past cultures known by Art.

We are born then depart.

Co-exist on earth committed."

Holy Week captures the power of hate. When God came among us a man, we killed him. That's the power of hate. Hate looks at the world through the lens of fear. Fear turns to anger, and, too often, anger turns to death and destruction. As the poem tells us, to eliminate war, we have to eliminate hate.

Fortunately, Holy Week captures the greater power of love! Love is stronger than death. Death died on Calvary, not life.

Love looks at life through the lens of forgiveness and compassion and calm and caring. Love casts out fear. We see life for what it is, and we see others for what they are. Each of us, made in the image and likeness of God, carries the presence of the divine within us. Love sees each person as another Christ.

The most amazing absolution in all of history came from the cross on Mount Calvary:

“Father forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing!”

From a human point of view, from an ego point of view, that statement is absurd. Of course ‘they’ knew what they were doing. The religious leaders had been opposed to Jesus for years. Since they didn’t have the authority to carry out a death sentence, they conspired with the political rulers to kill Jesus. Of course they knew what they were doing.

But did they really know? Had they known this man embodied the presence of God, would they have killed him? I think not.

And you and I sin from ignorance mostly as well. We only hurt one another when we forget that what we do to the least person we do to God.

Yes, past cultures are known by art. All cultures must be guided by love. “We are born then depart.”

We honor life from womb to tomb. We come from the hand of God and go back to God’s arms.

The words of the poet are inscribed on stone. The law of love is written on the human heart. Hate looks at life through the lens of fear. Love looks at life through the eyes of God. And love sees only God.