

THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION

Some ONE Must be Responsible for all this:

It is heart breaking to watch the television these days and you see how some people in this country are devastated by the floods. To understand how it feels like to those people, you just have to imagine what it would feel like if it happened to you!

As we watched the floods, the newsmen reported the terrible drought which is devastating farms in California, the United States of America; crops are scorched to the ground and farm animals look like living skeletons. Scientists on both sides of the Atlantic are baffled as many explanations are invented.

This weather has something to do with our faith. Modern man has for so long boasted of his/her scientific genius, he has gone to the space and outer space. He has explored the depth of the oceans and his genius in medicine has enabled him to claim control over life itself; one part of the body can be transplanted onto another without any complications. Recently man discovered something which he named "*God particle*" and with the Hadron Collider, he is now convinced that there is no God! A top cosmologist recently said that we do not need God to explain our human existence or the existence of the world in which

we live and on which we depend. Therefore believing in any power greater than Man's will be a waste of time. It sounds great; but how is it that we are helpless and powerless when nature rebels?

Christianity speaks to us about a God (cosmologists do not) and the Christian Creed gives him attributes, namely that he is "*Almighty, "Maker/Creator" of heaven and earth of what we see and of what we do not see.*" We should not be slow to realize that Man is like a tiny grain of sand in the universe incapable of saving himself.

Cynics are not only in our time but they were common at the time of Jesus too. Do you know what; he ridiculed them: "*hypocrites*" he said you know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky how is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time (Lk 12: 56)? The inability of man to control the forces of nature should be a strong message to remind us that indeed there is a God who is responsible for all this no matter how much we try to ignore or to deny his existence. We do not need greater signs to remind us that we are not in charge. I think that the greatest achievement that man can make in life is to acknowledge his Creator and live according to his commandments.

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REMEMBERING THE FOUR LAST REALITIES:

On Wednesday we shall begin our Lenten observance it is a time whose tone is centered on repentance and conversion. These days some people have a misunderstanding of what Lent means and the effects it aims to bring from within our souls. I followed a group of Christian women walking towards the railway station this week, they were talking about what they were planning to give up for Lent, much of what they aimed to achieve was to lose weight by eating less cakes and chocolates and taking more vegetables for Sunday dinner instead of settling on traditional Sunday roast! Lenten observance of this kind will be good for the *NHS* campaign to reduce obesity but a bad idea for the soul. So what is Lent all about? It is about your soul's relationship with God.

Do you know that people are no longer concerned that one day each one of us will have to stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account of our life whether we like it or not? Well, Lent is the time to awaken in us that sense of duty which we have towards God and neighbor a time to be converted, to change our life and to live as believers and followers of Christ.

In the shifting winds of modern cultures, the idea of everlasting torment and eternal damnation is repulsive and difficult for people to grasp; yet the Christian bible makes it clear that hell is a literal place. A society like ours which is afraid of facing the truth about itself as Christ taught it tries to please everyone by going to great lengths to assure that no one is offended. Thus the biblical doctrine of hell is considered too harsh, too old-fashioned, too insensitive and offensive. Will the wisdom of this world which is focused on this life, with no thought of life after death change or obliterate the teaching of Jesus Christ? I don't think so. Jesus spoke more about hell than he did about heaven. Rejection or revision of the doctrine of hell will not lessen its flames or make the place go away.

Remember the four last things; **Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell** if you have conquered the first one or if you have means of avoiding it, there is no need to worry about the other three but if that is not the case, Lenten season is here to awaken within us the truth about ourselves in the eyes of God. Let your hearts be broken not your garments torn.

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ST. PERPETUA AFRICAN MARTYR

Last Friday was a Feast of two African Martyrs Ss. Perpetua and Felicitas who were martyred at Carthage on 7th March 203. The account of their martyrdom is historical and has special interest as much of it was written by Perpetua herself before her death. This makes it one of the earliest pieces of writing by a Christian woman.

Our Choir mistress is called Perpetua. Her mother gave her that name probably because of her admiration for the saint; she wanted her daughter to imitate such a great African Saint. Some parents chose names for their children at baptism without meaning! Who was Perpetua? Below is some truth about her faith:

A number of catechumens were arrested including Felicitas and Perpetua who was about 22 years old newly married and had an infant son at the breast. Her mother and father were still alive and one of her two brothers was a catechumen like herself. While under arrest her father out of love tried to persuade her to deny she was a Christian, this would save her life and the baby at the breast. *'Father,' she said, 'do you see this jar; could it be called by any other name than what it is?'* *'No' replied her dad. 'Well, so too I cannot be called anything other than what I am, a Christian.'* At this her father was so angered by the word 'Christian' that he moved towards her as though he would pluck her eyes out.

Perpetua was imprisoned with her baby she nursed him but was faint from hunger. In her anxiety she spoke to her mother about the child. She could have had the opportunity to save her life if only she denied that she was a Christian.

One day while they were eating breakfast they were suddenly hurried off for a hearing. All the Christian prisoners questioned admitted their guilt. Hilarianus the governor passed sentence on them to be condemned to the beasts!

The day of their victory came, and they marched from the prison to the amphitheater joyfully as though they were going to a party, with calm faces, with joy rather than fear. Perpetua went along with calm steps as the beloved of God, as a wife of Christ, putting down everyone's stare by her own intense gaze. Perpetua and Felicitas were thrown to a mad bull which tossed and trampled them up and down. She called for her brother and spoke to him together with the catechumens and said: *'You must all **stand fast in the faith and love one another, and do not be weakened by what we have gone through.**'* You and I might not suffer martyrdom, but we are expected to live it daily. How? Through the daily acts of fidelity to Jesus Christ. Martyrdom is not a thing of the past, it happens even today. Jesus did not promise that we shall be successful, but he expects us to be faithful.

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IT COST HIM SO MUCH

As Lent progresses, the Cross will become central in our Christian worship to such an extent that by Good Friday all that will be left in our midst will be the Crucifix. Christian tradition has no inhibition to say that Jesus Christ its hero died the most painful and disgraceful forms of death. Crucifixion was one of the most dreaded methods of execution in the ancient world. Apart from dying in indescribable agony, there was also the shame of dying naked in the public view of everyone. The Tenth Station of the Way of the Cross tells us that Jesus was stripped of his garments. It is hard to tell how much clothing was left on a condemned man. Jesus was not spared of this public humiliation.

Accounts of crucifixions are recorded among ancient civilizations, most likely originating with the Persians and then spreading to the Assyrians, Scythians, Carthaginians, Germans, Celts and Britons. Crucifixion was primarily reserved for traitors, captive armies, slaves and the worst of criminals. Over the course of history, different types and shapes of crosses existed for different forms of crucifixion.

Execution by crucifixion became common under the rule of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.). By the time of Jesus even the ordinary Jew was familiar with crucifixion;

such that at the trial of Jesus they shouted back to Pilate "crucify him, crucify him". The Roman form of crucifixion was not employed in the Old Testament by the Jewish people, as they saw it to be the most horrible, cursed forms of death (Deut 21:23). The only exception was reported by the historian Josephus when the Jewish high priest Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.) ordered the crucifixion of 800 Pharisees.

It is difficult to understand why the early Christians who became gospel writers did not invent a better story to describe the death of its hero but remained adamant to insist that he died on a Roman cross as recorded in Matthew 27: 32-56, Mark 15:21-38, Luke 23:26-49, and John 19:16-37. What does this mean to us? Just this, Christianity as preached by the Catholic Church has no secrets about itself and it has no plan to change the gospel message so as to sound acceptable; the truth is the truth that is why the early Christians never invented a more acceptable myth about the death of Jesus.

When you look at the Crucifix today feel proud of yourself, God loved us so much and the cross tells how much it cost him. In honor of Christ's death the practice of crucifixion was abolished by Emperor Constantine in 337 A.D.

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