

Healing Justice and the Paschal Mystery:

A Holy Week Devotional

What is healing justice?

Healing justice, sometimes also called restorative justice, is a way of responding to harm that is aimed at meeting the needs of those harmed and providing a pathway to restoration and healing for those who have been harmed and those who have done harm.

One difference between healing justice and restorative justice is that restorative justice is usually a response to a particular event (a crime, or a particular harm done). But healing justice takes a wider view. Healing justice is based on the idea that justice does not occur only at a particular moment in response to harm, but is an ongoing practice in our lives and our communities.

Practicing healing justice means looking for ways to promote mercy and truth in our everyday lives.

Participating in community rituals can help strengthen our practice of healing justice. This devotional explores how we can grow in healing justice, looking through the lens of the rituals of Holy Week in the Christian tradition.

The Paschal Mystery

When Christians talk about the *Paschal Mystery*, we mean Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, by which God reconciled the world to God's self. The Paschal Mystery is what we celebrate during Holy Week.

The services of Holy Week are a commemoration of what Jesus did in the last days of his life, and of his death and resurrection. The services form a journey:

- Maundy Thursday (or Holy Thursday) is the service that commemorates the Last Supper. It usually includes, in the church, a service of holy communion, as well as often a ritual of footwashing, to remember how Jesus washed his disciples' feet. It was also the traditional time when those who had sinned and repented were welcomed back into the church.
- Good Friday is the commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion. It usually includes the reading of the Passion Gospel and the veneration of the cross, as well as prayers for the church and the world.
- Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter, is the day when the church remembers Jesus' burial and the fact that he was truly dead and buried. It is a day of contemplation and silent waiting.
- The Great Vigil of Easter (on Saturday evening) is the first service of Easter and the first celebration of the resurrection. This service, developed from ancient traditions, is the culmination of the Holy Week journey. In the celebration of the resurrection, we experience God's forgiveness and anticipate the reconciliation of all things in the new creation to come.
- As we enter together into these services and the Paschal Mystery they represent, we will explore practices of healing justice that they can help us build.

Maundy Thursday

- Maundy Thursday is the commemoration of the Last Supper, when Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples, established the sacrament of Holy Communion, and washed their feet. This is a day to practice *inviting* people into community and then *practicing mercy* in our life together.
- Read John 13:1–17. Jesus, though “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6) offers his love and mercy to his disciples in service to them.

Invitation to Community

- Traditional liturgies for Maundy Thursday began with the reconciliation of penitents to the community. This practice was in *invitation* to them, and to us, to enter into the mystery of Holy Week more deeply together.
- One pastor developed a profound practice for her congregation, having them write down the name of someone they were in conflict with—and then making those names the invited guests for a special dinner! Try writing (but not necessarily sending) an invitation to dinner, to someone you have had conflict with. What might you write? What words might you use to invite them? How does writing that invitation make you feel? Would you send it if you could?
- What else might the practice of invitation look like in your context? Is there someone you have been excluding or ignoring who you might reach out to on this day?

Practicing Mercy

- Pray this beautiful anthem, which is sung in the Maundy Thursday service, with promises of Jesus:

The Lord Jesus, after he had supped with his disciples and had washed their feet, said to them, "Do you know what I, your Lord and Master, have done to you? I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done."

Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

*I give you a new commandment:
Love one another as I have loved you.*

Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

*By this shall the world know that you are my disciples:
That you have love for one another.*

- Think about the person you were in conflict with, who you “invited” to dinner. Imagine sitting down at a table with that person. What might you offer them to eat or drink? Write down a description of your favorite food and what it means to you, and imagine offering it to that person. How does this make you feel? Is it joyful, or is it uncomfortable? Be present to that feeling.
- What other ways can you imagine to practice mercy in your context?

Good Friday

Truth-telling: Lament and Confession

- Good Friday is when we remember the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus' death was the revelation of God's judgment on the ways we harm one another and an on all injustice and oppression (John 12:31). On Good Friday, we can practice *truth-telling*. Two important forms of truth-telling are lament, where we express to God and others our pain about injustice and harm done to us, and confession, where we take responsibility for the ways we have harmed others. By the truth-telling of lament and confession, we participate in the revelation of God's truth and love, as they were made visible on the cross.
- Read the traditional scripture reading for this day, the Passion Gospel: John 18:1–19:37.
- Two ancient forms of prayer for Good Friday are the "Solemn Intercessions" and the "Solemn Reproaches." The Solemn Intercessions represent lament for all the ways people suffer and are in need. The Solemn Reproaches are a form of confession for how we have hurt one another.
- In the spirit of the Solemn Intercessions, pray for the whole human family: for the church, for the world and all the leaders of every nation, for all who suffer, for all who have persecuted or harmed others. Pray this closing prayer:

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
- In the Solemn Reproaches, Jesus speaks directly to the church, of the harm we have caused to one another:

*"O my church, O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I offended you? Answer me.
I gave you my peace, but you draw the sword in my name.
I grafted you into my people Israel,
but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt.
I came to you in the least of your brothers and sisters,
but I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me no drink,
a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me,
and you have prepared a cross for your Savior.*
- Write a *lament*. This can be any description of something that causes you pain or sorrow, whether it is something that happened to you, or something you did, or a conflict with someone, or an injustice in the world that upsets you. What do you feel when you think about that situation? What do you wish you could ask God? What do you wish you could ask another person about what happened? What makes you angriest? What makes you saddest? What makes you most hopeful? What would bring you healing? Pour out your heart to God. Lament is a place to be honest with God, even if we are angry with God.
- What other forms of truth-telling could you imagine in your context? Is there a trusted friend or counselor with whom you could share a story?

Holy Saturday

Closure and Remaining

- Holy Saturday is the day when we commemorate Jesus' burial, the day when he lies silent and dead in the tomb before his resurrection. It is a day for *closure* and *remaining*. *Closure* can mean ritually letting go the harms done to us and things we cannot change, as much as possible. But closure is not always easy or possible. *Remaining* is another way we can find peace in the aftermath of suffering, being present to our own feelings and being present with one another in solidarity.
- Read Matthew 27:57–61. After the burial of Jesus, his disciples kept the sabbath, resting on this day of silent waiting.
- Pray this traditional prayer for Holy Saturday:

*O God, Creator of heaven and earth:
Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb
and rested on this holy Sabbath,
so we may await with him the coming of the third day,
and rise with him to newness of life;
who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

- As a ritual of closure, try taking the lament you wrote yesterday, and destroy it: tear it up or throw it away. Imagine laying Jesus in the tomb as you do, knowing that “it is finished” (John 19:30). How does it feel to destroy that piece of paper? Is it a relief, or is it uncomfortable? Be present and remain with that feeling, whatever it is.
- What other “rituals of closure” could you imagine in your context?

The Great Vigil of Easter

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- Beginning at sunset on Saturday evening, the Great Vigil of Easter is the first celebration of the resurrection. The church gathers in darkness and silence, then kindles the new light of Easter, remembers the history of salvation, and rejoices in the resurrection of Jesus. Easter Vigil is a time to hope for *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not always possible, and can never be required. But the church's Easter celebration anticipates the reconciliation of all things in God at the end of time. Every act of forgiveness is a moment when we participate in the new creation of God which is coming.
- Pray this ancient hymn for the Great Vigil of Easter:

*This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel,
out of bondage in Egypt,
and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.*

*This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin,
and are restored to grace and holiness of life.*

*This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell,
and rose victorious from the grave.*

*How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined
and humankind is reconciled to God.*

- "This is the night" when heaven and earth, past and future, are united in God's mysterious reconciliation of all things. Imagine yourself at the moment of Jesus' resurrection. What do you see, hear, feel? Now read Revelation 21:1–22:5 and try to imagine yourself there. What do you see, hear, feel?
- As you are imagining, thinking of the person whose name you wrote down on Thursday, with whom you were in conflict. Imagine them present with you in the scene depicted in Revelation 21:1–22:5. How does this feel different than imagining them at dinner with you as you did on Thursday? Have your feelings changed over the past few days?
- Is there someone you have been wishing to forgive who you can reach out to or write to? Is there something for which you have been wishing to forgive yourself? When you imagine yourself in the heavenly city of Revelation 21:1–22:5, how does that affect your feelings of forgiveness toward yourself and others? It's okay if you do not yet feel forgiveness. Be present to your feelings, whatever they are.
- What other moment or ritual of joy or forgiveness can you imagine today in your context?