

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL
LESSONS FROM LAMENTATIONS
(Part 6)

LAMENTING AND LEARNING

Today is Holy Saturday. Jesus was crucified yesterday and died on the cross. Today all creation mourns in silent grief. Today we are in lamentations.

Thoughts race through our minds, after the frenzy of yesterday's happenings. What does it all mean? What happens now? How will the future be?

For us, we of course know that tomorrow Jesus will rise from the dead (Mt 28:1-10) and be victorious. In the same way, though we know that Jesus' victory will become complete at the end of time, today we are in some sort of state of suspension. We look to the life to come, but we are often troubled by the life we live now. We suffer afflictions in the world.

Holy Saturday represents a time of transition. It is that moment in time between seeming defeat and glorious victory. It is right between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It is between darkness (Mt 27:45) and light (Mt 28:3).

It is a time of preparation for what is to come. It is a time of transition from grief to great joy. It is a time of learning the lessons of lamentations.

Here again is the reflection offered two years ago (from the book "Forty Days of Lamentations"). It still is, and always will be, relevant to our life in Christ.

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Day 40
Holy Saturday
Covenant and Lamentations – 3

"You are clothed with majesty and glory"
(Psalm 104:1c)

April 7
Genesis 1:1-2:2
Psalm 104:1-35
Genesis 22:1-18
Matthew 28:1-10

Jesus is dead and lies buried in the tomb. Suddenly everything seems to stand still. The frenzy of the crucifixion has dissipated. The cries of the crowd have died down. The heckling of the passers-by, the chief priests, the scribes and even the criminal crucified with him has been silenced. The weeping of the women continues but now in private.

The noise of the earthquake, the splitting rocks and the opening of tombs is heard no longer. It was the sabbath, and everyone rested.

God too was quiet. It seemed as if He too were at rest. It might even have seemed that He had abandoned His Son. It was a significant and very meaningful pause in time. A great and awesome event had just happened in the world, the death of God's own Son. His subsequent resurrection would change the world. The moment in between was the moment of transition.

Something just as awesome had happened before. God created the whole universe and the first human beings (Gn 1:1-2:2), and started His plan for the world rolling. After all the work He had done, God rested (Gn 2:2).

Both momentous events were according to God's plan. In both, God was completely in control. With both, God intended to manifest His love for the world. With creation, at the beginning of time, God created paradise and lived with His people. But paradise was lost. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, God would restore His people to Himself, and prepare them once again for paradise, the new Jerusalem, at the end of time, where they would live with Him forever.

Now God created everything not for Himself but for us. And God sacrificed His own Son also for us. Whether life or death, we are at the center of God's designs. God's love is all about us. And even God's continuing work is entrusted to us. God created the universe, but entrusted it to Adam and Eve. "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth." (Gn 1:28). Jesus won salvation for humankind on the cross, but leaves it to his disciples to proclaim that good news. The good that God intends, whether in creation or in salvation, has become totally dependent upon His people.

This is the importance of covenant. It stresses our relationship with God. It is a relationship where God blesses us, and we become a blessing to the world. It is a relationship where we are stewards of God's gifts, whether the gift of a beautiful and bountiful world, or the gift of eternal salvation.

So we are crucial to what God wants to do in the world. What is that? "When you send forth your breath, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." (Ps 104:30). God has created, now He intends to renew His creation.

How do we allow ourselves to be used by God?

First, we recognize God's great power. "If God glares at the earth, it trembles, if God touches the mountains, they smoke!" (Ps 104:32). "Lord, my God, you are great indeed! You are clothed with majesty and glory" (Ps 104:1). God is the awesome Creator. As Creator, God put order in the universe (Ps 104:5-9,19-20), and provides for the needs of His creatures (Ps 104:10-18,27-28). We are totally dependent upon God. "When you open your hand, they are well filled. When you hide your face, they are lost." (Ps 104:28b-29a). God's power is what we rely on in being used as His instruments to renew the face of the earth. Recognizing God's power gives us faith, and it is faith that unleashes the power of God.

Second, we recognize God as God. He is the Almighty, the Omnipotent. He is worthy of our praise and worship. "I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God while I live." (Ps 104:33). We can only accomplish God's will for our lives if we

know who sends us forth and sustains us, so that we will always look to His mind and His ways. We must always be intimately connected with God.

Third, we recognize what our task is, and that is to be instruments to establish the kingdom of God in our midst. This necessitates liberating people from what is not of God, and fighting against the dominion of the evil one. God intends to renew the face of the earth, purifying it once again and redeeming humanity from its sins. “May sinners vanish from the earth, and the wicked be no more.” (Ps 104:35a).

Fourth, we must be totally obedient. We must not adapt our human minds to secular wisdom, but we must put on the mind of Christ. Abraham obeyed God when told to sacrifice his own son (Gn 22:1-18). It must have been extremely difficult, since Isaac was his “only one, whom (he) love(d)” (Gn 22:2), and Isaac was the only hope of fulfilling God’s promise that he would have many descendants. But Abraham obeyed, and he was blessed. “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—all this because you obeyed my command.” (Gn 22:16-18).

But more amazingly, God sacrificed His own Son Jesus. Unlike Isaac, whom God prevented Abraham from slaughtering, He allowed His Son to die on the cross. It was extremely difficult for Jesus to go to his passion and death, but he obeyed and allowed the Father’s will to be done. And his obedience also has brought blessing to all the nations of the earth.

If we obey and allow God to use us in any way He wants to, if we are willing to serve Him to the point of even giving our lives, then we too will become blessings for the life of the world.

Finally, in doing our task, full as it will be of pain, suffering and crosses, we are to rejoice. We rejoice because of the privilege of doing God’s work. We rejoice because of the victory that has already been won on the cross. We rejoice because the insults, slander and persecution we suffer for the sake of Christ assure us of our reward in heaven (Mt 5:10-12). Thus, in whatever situation we are in, we can rightly say, “I will rejoice in the Lord.” (Ps 104:34b).

Today is the moment of transition. It is that meaningful pause in history, when time seems to stand still. It is the moment between seeming defeat and actual victory. It is the transition from a world disfigured by sin to a world whose face is renewed.

For us in CFC, this is the moment of Lamentations. It is the transition between our first 25 years and our next 25 years. It is a time for looking back at the infidelities of the past and even of the present, and looking forward to restoration and greater empowerment. It is the period of experiencing the pain and crosses in life, but anticipating the fullness of hope and joy.

We are at the crossroads, at that significant moment in time and history. This is our God-given time to learn the lessons of Lamentations.

And know that tomorrow Jesus rises from the dead. And so Jesus himself tells us, “Do not be afraid.” (Mt 28:10). Let not the seeming silence of God, nor the seeming hopelessness of our human situation, ever bring us down. The victory is at hand.

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What was supposed to be our response to what God was teaching us?

Covenant response: Learn the lessons of Lamentations.

Did we learn the lessons of Lamentations?

In 2007 we did not. God gave us a great opportunity to experience His victory, in preparation for the next 25 years of CFC. What resulted instead was an intensification of the crisis, and the eventual split. It was still Good Friday, as the enemy was still victorious.

But God worked to fulfill His plan, in spite of our own shortcomings. God raised CFC-FFL, the restored CFC, the authentic CFC.

Now it is two years later. We have learned a lot, but we still need to learn more. We have been restored, but we still need to attain to the fullness of God's plan for us.

If another crisis is to be avoided, if we are to move forward in God's plan for us, if we are to experience the power of the resurrection in our work, we need to continue to learn the lessons of Lamentations.

There are very many lessons indeed. Here are some of them (from the book "Forty Days of Lamentations").

Lam 101-107. 7 Basic Elements of Lamentations

Lam 111-117. 7 Pastoral Principles of Lamentations

Lam 121-127. 7 Threats to Lamentations

Lam 131-137. 7 Fruits of Lamentations

Lam 141-147. 7 Persons who do not Understand Lamentations

Are you among those who do not understand Lamentations? Are you among those who would claim the victory of Easter Sunday without reflecting on and learning the meaning of Good Friday, that that victory is rooted on the cross? Are you among those who would miss out on the wonderful opportunity of learning from God during the transition of Holy Saturday?

Because God has His plan from eternity, because of God's love for us so greatly shown on the cross, we face a glorious future, we will experience His victory. But a response is needed from us. But if we do not learn the lessons of Lamentations, then our response will be inadequate, even erroneous.

As God, having restored us, calls us once again to our mission, can we respond "Ready!" (Gn 22:1). Are we truly ready to be obedient, no matter what is demanded of us? Are we ready to sacrifice our Isaacs, everything that we hold dear?

Let us always trust in Jesus our Savior. But let us do our part, so that we can experience the fullness of God's plan for us.

Holy Saturday
April 11, 2009