

The Passion of Jesus of Nazareth

A reflection by David Keller: 6/4/2005

In Jesus' pilgrimage during Holy week we see a man...a human being. But we see more than a biological human being. We see a complete and authentic human being. We see the man, Jesus of Nazareth, passionately open to and filled with the spirit and nature of God. The observance of Holy Week often is consumed by a focus on Jesus' physical and emotional suffering. We refer to that intense suffering as "Jesus' passion". But what brought Jesus to that "passion"? The passion of Holy Week was the consequence of another passion. Jesus was a man **passionate about life** and the need to be completely human, born of both flesh and the spirit.

The suffering during Holy Week was the consequence of Jesus passion for life. He was passionate about uncovering the hypocrisy of religious and political leaders and the burdens they placed on ordinary people. He was willing to risk the consequence of his candor, his anger, and his protests. Jesus was passionate in his love and concern for victims, the ignorant, the spiritually apathetic, the poor, the marginalized, and the same religious and political leaders he criticized. Jesus was passionate about luring those around him into the compassionate and life-giving presence of God. Jesus was passionate about the reality of God's presence in life itself, in his own life, the lives of other people, and in the joys and tragedies within his own society.

It was this unrelenting passion for life that placed him in conflict with leaders in his society that abused their power and authority. His desire to recall them to authentic human life and restore justice and righteous living threatened their control of society. They chose to confront him and eliminate his influence. Eventually, Jesus realized that he must "go up to Jerusalem" and confront the abuses of his society at the seat of religious and political power. Jesus' simple entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was in stark contrast to the triumphal and controlling power of the Roman occupiers and to those leaders of his own faith community who used wealth and power to ensure their leadership and favor with Rome, in the name of protecting their religious traditions and practices. Jesus' passion in entering Jerusalem was not a suicidal mission to become a martyr for justice. At the same time he was clearly aware of the consequences of his teaching and protests in the seats of power. It was his passion for life that led both to the sufferings we label as his "passion" and to his death on the cross.

The vitality and spiritual power of Jesus' passion for life transcended his death. The same passion that was so vividly present during his life was present in his death and resurrection. It was that passion that filled the lives of those who experienced his risen presence. They, too, became passionate about life. They experienced God's life in Jesus so vividly that they eventually would call him God's son and Lord, and Savior.

During Holy Week and the Great Fifty Days of Easter we have the opportunity to enter a spirit of contemplation of Jesus' passion for life, to look anew at the Gospels and discover that we, too, are called to be so open to God that we experience Jesus' oneness with God and his passion for life. In this way we will become fully and abundantly alive, authentically human, and capable of being a source of life to others. This passion for life will lead us in the same path Jesus followed, with the same consequences. We may experience pain and suffering. But we will also experience resurrection.

It is essential to see that Jesus' passion was manifested in his **entire life** and not only during his courageous suffering during what we call Holy Week. If we look at his passion for life throughout the Gospels we can see a three-fold pattern:

- Jesus was passionate about his relationship with his *Abba*, his heavenly father, the Holy One. He is passionate about this relationship and shows that it is what makes us children of God. Jesus' life of prayer included silent reflection in quiet places away from others, regular participation in synagogue worship and the great feasts at the Temple in Jerusalem, and in deep contemplative experience. (Luke describes Jesus at prayer "*in God*", not "to God".) Jesus was so committed to his life with God that he experienced a unity with God that enabled Jesus to know that his words and actions came from God and not from his own wisdom and power. It was this union with God that enabled Jesus to manifest God's presence in his own life. St. Paul would say that in Jesus of Nazareth "...the fullness of God was present in human form." It was this non-dual relationship with God that was the source of Jesus compassion for all people and his delight in the sacredness of nature.
- Jesus' oneness with God enabled the presence of God to be manifest in his life. His greatest passion was for all those who were attracted to him to be one with the Father and he was one with the Father. If we are passionate about our relationship with God, we will manifest God's presence in every aspect of our lives, including our homes. God will be revealed in us as God was revealed in Jesus. This is where family and home life begins. "In my Father's house there are many rooms." The earliest Christian teachers were mystics and contemplatives. They believed, through their own experience, that we are called "to participate in the divine nature".
- If we are passionate about our relationship with God and are truly open to God's presence in our lives, our lives will manifest God's presence. This union with God will evoke a *generative response* and will enter into every aspect of our daily lives. The world will be different because of our God-filled lives. And this living-presence, manifest in our words and actions, will evoke a similar generative response from others. This release of generativity is what gives life to the world and completes the creation of our humanness. Jesus said "I have come that you may have life and have life in abundance." He was not talking about material security or abundance. He was speaking about the purity of heart, charity, and humility that are the womb of compassion, civility, and stewardship that enable us to know what is necessary for our lives and help us honor one another and serve the common good. This abundant life is impossible as long as we are in control of our own lives

The passion of Jesus enables us to look at the life-pilgrimage of one man and see in his life a paradigm of our own life's pilgrimage. **Jesus did not die to somehow change God's mind about us...the death of Jesus can help us change our minds about ourselves.** The passion of Jesus can transform our lives...and the sad thing about his death is that he did not have to die to enable us experience such transformation. Yet the passion for life that caused his death and resurrection draw us with amazing power to the transformation he makes possible. The reality of his death and resurrection became a powerful means for the *transmission* of his consciousness and unitive experience of God to us. St. Paul says it clearly: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." That is the nature of sacred passion, whether at work, in society or in our homes. It transforms things and people; it draws out the best in others. It ennobles persons and events.

The passion of Jesus gives us an opportunity to look at and experience a man who was so fully alive and filled with God's spirit that OUR spirits cry out **to be that alive**. It is this desire for aliveness and authenticity of life that releases us from those things that keep us from our full life with God and others, especially those closest to us in our homes and at work. The passion and energy of God's presence in Jesus can release whatever is within us that stand in the way of our intimacy with others at home and at work. Our western culture today is craving for this authentic intimacy. At the same time we are afraid of the mutual responsibilities and stewardship such intimacy will bring. We do not know how or where to find true intimacy and wholesome outlets for our passions. This is why our media, entertainment, and relationships are so dysfunctional. Only our naked presence to God's love will lure us to authentic human life; the passion of Jesus is a call to love.

This is what happened to those who experienced and were affected by Jesus' resurrection – once they had the courage to stop moping about his death and their lost hopes. In the humanity and passion of Jesus those around him saw a sacrament of God – an outward and visible sign in his human life of the authentic presence of God – and Jesus called them to go beyond the sign of God in his life to **their own experience of God**. Jesus called those who were close to him, before and after his resurrection, to do greater things than he had done. Jesus' passion was to transmit his enlightened experience of God to others. He knew that the consciousness of God present in his life was what God desires for every human being. He called people to discover the One who is already present in their lives. This is what he called fullness of life. "I have come that you may have life, and have life in abundance."

The pilgrimage of Jesus can draw us to what he desires for us: **our own pilgrimage into the heart of God**. The vitality and spiritual power of Jesus' passion transcended his death and the presence of God in the risen Christ transformed the lives of those who formed the earliest Christian faith communities. **They, too, became passionate about life.**

If we are passionate about our life with God our lives will manifest the wisdom, energy, consciousness, and presence of God. We will truly become sources of life for others...at home and at work. By sharing our passion we will not only be a source of life...we will lure others to discover the gift of God's passion in their lives.