

Poets, Preachers and the Passion of Christ – Lenten Addresses 2015  
Parish of Christ Church, Windsor, Nova Scotia  
*Fr. David Curry*

First Address

The conjunction of *The Feast of St. Matthias* and the first week of Lent complements our Lenten programme. Matthias is chosen to take the place of Judas in the company of the Apostles. His feast day frequently falls within the Lenten orbit and reminds us of the interplay of the theological themes of justification and sanctification that belong to the classical Eucharistic lectionary including the propers for the Saints that expand the range of our incorporation into the life of glory.

The Lesson from *Acts* (*Acts 1. 15-26*) tells the story of his being chosen by lot and situates his election within the context of Judas' betrayal. Lent bids us confront all our betrayals for such is the deep reality of sin but in the choosing of Matthias we also see the theme of restoration and redemption; the conquest of sin, we might say, by divine love.

Sin and love are the grand and great themes that belong to Christian meditation especially in the season of Lent. Some of the poets and preachers of our Anglican tradition help us to think about the themes of sin and love as concentrated in the Passion of Christ.

What I purpose is to consider certain poems by George Herbert and John Donne, especially, as well as some of the Lenten and Passion Sermons by Lancelot Andrewes and John Donne; all figures from the later 16th and early 17th century who contribute greatly to the praying imagination about the centrality of the Passion of Christ and its meaning for us in the pilgrimage of our souls to God and with God.

These poets and preachers all recognize the centrality of the Passion of Christ. It is not too much to say that it is a consistent and common emphasis for all of them. Donne and Andrewes are emphatic that the whole life of Christ is concentrated in the Passion.

As Donne puts it:

The whole life of Christ was a continuall Passion, his birth and his death were but a continuall Act and his Christmas-day and his Good Friday are but the evening and the morning of one and the same day.

He is echoing what Lancelot Andrewes notes in a Passion Sermon preached on March 29th, 1605.

It is well known that Christ and His cross were never parted, but that all His life long was a continuous cross. At the very cratch, His cross first began. There

Herod sought to do that which Pilate did, even to end His life before it began. All His life after, saith the Apostle in the next verse was nothing but a perpetual "gainsaying of sinners," (Heb. 12.3) which we call crossing.

Andrewes text is *Hebrews 12.2*. "Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, and despised the shame; and is set at the right-hand of the throne of God." He examines Luke's word for the passion, namely, theory or sight, θεωριαν (Luke 23.48), calling attention to the spectacle of the Passion as concentrated on the Cross. The point is that Christ's life as a continuous cross is ultimately concentrated for us in the crucifixion.

That emphasis on looking and seeing is further extended to reading in another Passion Sermon preached before the court of Queen Elizabeth on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1597 on the text from Zechariah: "And they shall look upon Me, Whom they have pierced." Andrewes works on the different senses of looking and piercing and applies the text imaginatively and spiritually to our looking upon the crucified and reading there the love of God for our humanity pierced by sin even as we have pierced the Son of God. "For Christ pierced on the cross is liber charitatis, 'the very book of love' laid open before us."

It is a poem by George Herbert which concentrates the themes of sin and love most profoundly and connects them to our looking and knowing, locating the patterns of devotion within an intellectual and spiritual tradition of theology. The poem is entitled *The Agonie* and we will have more than one occasion to consider what it presents in its three stanzas.

Philosophers have measur'd mountains,  
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,  
Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced fountains:  
But there are two vast, spacious things,  
The which to measure it doth more behove;  
Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love.

Sin and love are precisely the themes of Lent as concentrated in the Passion of Christ. In a way, the whole point of the Lenten Sundays and the feast days that occasionally occur within Lent is to anticipate the events of Holy Week itself, the events of the Passion. Following the insight of Andrewes and Donne, Herbert too emphasizes the Passion as present in the whole life of Christ; the Incarnation means nothing apart from its fuller meaning in the Passion. But in *The Agonie* he signals a contrast between the teaching of the Passion and other forms of knowing.

"*Philosophers have measur'd mountains,/Fathom'd the depths of seas*" he begins, describing poetically natural philosophy in its inquiries into the operations of the natural world. The verbs "*measur'd*" and "*fathom'd*" then extend beyond the study of nature to human affairs. "*Philosophers have measur'd and fathom'd the depths ... of states, and kings,*" political

philosophy, we might say. Philosophers then have *"walk'd with a staff to heav'n, and traced fountains,"* he says, meaning metaphysical philosophy or natural theology, the inquiry into first principles, the end and source of all reality, we might say. None of these forms of enterprise are to be derided or denied, but Herbert goes on to argue for the need of another science – not unlike Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*. A divine science, we might say, because *"there are two vast, spacious things,"* he says, that takes more to measure but which are required to be investigated, *"the which to measure it doth more behove."* *"Yet,"* as he notes *"few there are that sound them,"* working through measuring and fathoming to sounding, all verbs of knowing. But what are those *"two vast, spacious things"*? *"Sinne and love,"* he says.

The poem goes on to argue that to sound or know *"sinne and love"* means to ponder the Passion. *"Who would know Sinne,"* the second stanza says, must *"repair/ Unto Mount Olivet,"* to the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night in which Christ was betrayed and to his agony of prayer in the garden. We cannot help but recall, too, the kiss of Judas, the moment of betrayal, in that garden. But what about Love? How is love to be known? The third stanza takes us to the Cross and, like Andrewes, to Christ pierced on the Cross. Following the fathers as noted by Hooker, another Anglican Divine of the late 16th century, the sacraments are symbolically signified as flowing out of the pierced side of Christ on the Cross. And so, Herbert, in taking us to the crucifixion, also signals the triumph of love that continues to feed us eucharistically. *"Love,"* he says, *"is that liquor sweet and most divine, / Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine."*

Not only is the life of Christ *"a continuall passion"* but we participate in that passion continually through the sacramental life of the Apostolic Church as the Gospel for St. Matthias' day reminds us. It is the last and perhaps the greatest of the seven *"I am"* sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel. It presents us with the powerful image of the vine and the branches and the idea of our dwelling in the love of God. *"I am the vine, and ye are the branches,"* Jesus says, *"abide in me"; "for without me ye can do nothing."* Such passages have an intensity and a poignancy to them that is heightened all the more by *looking* and *measuring*, and *fathoming*, and *sounding* the depths of divine love in the Passion of Christ.

The poet, George Herbert, and the preacher, Lancelot Andrewes along with John Donne, argue for our knowing the Passion through what is revealed in the witness of the Scriptures, to what is known by another science, the science of theology in which we participate in that which we behold.

*The Feast of St. Matthias* complements their Lenten reflections on the Passion of Christ. Andrewes' sermon on St. Matthias' day in Lent, preached before Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich in 1590, takes as its text the psalmist's phrase, *"Thou didst lead Thy people like sheep, by the hand of Moses and Aaron"* (Ps. 77. 20), locating the choosing of Matthias

within the larger Scriptural context of the Old Testament. The sermon expands upon the different qualities of leadership under the hand of divine Providence, seeing in the two hands of Moses and Aaron different but complementary powers: *debita legalia*, "the duties of Parliament and common law" with Moses; *debita moralia*, "the duties of conscience and divinity" with Aaron. While emphasizing the theological foundations of political life and the need for good order through firm and gentle leadership by Kings and Queens, Andrewes is clear that all such leadings have a spiritual end and participate in the leading of the good Shepherd.

The leading is not in infinitum – endless and indeterminate but to an end, our end in God.

It must be *sicut oves* (like sheep), whom the good Shepherd, in the three and twentieth Psalm, leadeth to a place, and to a place meet for them, "where there is green pasture by the waters of comfort." So was it in this people here. They were led out of Egypt to sacrifice to God, and to learn His law in the Mount of God, Sinai; and from thence also to Sion itself, His own rest, and holy habitation. And even so our people are led from the wanderings of this world unto the folds of God's Church, where, as the Prophet saith in the seventy-third Psalm, first God "will a while guide them with His counsel, and after will receive them into His glory." And this is the end of all leading. To bring us all from the vain proffers of the world, which we shall all find, as Solomon found it, *vanitas vanitatem et omnia vanitas* ("vanity of vanities and all is vanity," *Ecclesiastes 1.2*), to the sound comfort of His word in this book, which is indeed *veritas veritatem et omnia veritas* (truth of truth and all is truth); in the knowledge and practice whereof, when they shall have fulfilled their course here, God will bring them to His own rest, to His Heavenly Jerusalem, where is and ever shall be *felicitas felicitatem et omnia felicitas* (joy of joy and all is joy or happiness of happiness and all is happiness).

This last phrase echoes the end of the Gospel reading for *The Feast of St. Matthias*. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." There is an end and a purpose to the forms of abiding in the word and love of God. It is found in and through the Passion of Christ for us and in our looking upon Christ crucified, measuring, fathoming, and sounding the depths of God's love and the depths of human sin, those "two vast, spacious things ... Sinne and Love". "Few there are that sound them," to be sure, but the poets and the preachers help us to read the book of love in the image of Christ crucified.

*Fr. David Curry*  
*Feast of St. Matthias (transf.)*  
*February 25th, 2015*

## Second Address

Lent is the season of penitential adoration. It concentrates our attention upon the Passion of Christ. But the term passion is complex and perplexing for us. We tend perhaps to associate it with our desires, what we often term our passions and more often than not we associate it particularly with erotic desires.

Plato, to be sure, uses the term *eros* in a more extended sense than simply the erotic in his dialogue *The Symposium*, using it to signify the passionate desire to know, the *eros* that compels us up the ladder of being and knowing. *The Symposium* means literally a drinking party but one in which we decide not to drink but to think, an idea that perhaps has some connection to the disciplines of Lent.

"Welcome deare feast of Lent," the poet George Herbert begins in a poem called, *Lent*. "Who loves not thee," he says, "He loves not Temperance, or Authoritie, /But is compos'd of passion." Passion but not the Passion of Christ. Passion here is juxtaposed with temperance and authority. Lent would bid us discipline our bodily appetites – our passions or desires for sensual pleasures. Temperance is the virtue of self-control, the self-control of our appetites for food, drink, or sex. "Authoritie" here refers to the Scriptures, to the Church, and, ultimately, to the authority of all authorities, God, the author of all things. There is the paradox that our strong desire, our passion for God, means the disciplining of our passions; our spiritual passion or desire vying with our bodily passions. The point of Lent is about setting our loves, our desires, our *eros*, in order. Ultimately, in the Christian understanding of things that brings us to the Passion of Christ.

His Passion signifies his being acted upon; passion meaning suffering. Buddhism, too, recognizes the problem of suffering which arises from our attachments and desires, all of which belong to our attachment to ourselves. All desire is suffering. Get rid of desire, you get rid of suffering but it means getting free of the idea of you. There is no you is the radical insight of Buddhism. This contrasts with the Christian idea of redemptive suffering. The Passion of Christ is what we have to contemplate in order not to be free of passion but to set our loves in order. Christ's Passion is about his suffering the consequences of the disorders of our passions; in short, our sins. Herbert's poem calls us to the disciplines of Lent as the way of "starving sinne" and in ways that have to do with compassion towards others, "banqueting the poore, /And among those his soul," as he puts it.

Knowing our spiritual poverty, the limitations of our humanity, is an important lesson. It is part and parcel of learning about ourselves. As Herbert says, "It's true, we cannot reach Christ's forti'th day;" Christ's fasting in the wilderness is more than what we can truly and fully imitate, precisely because we are "compos'd of passion," already compromised in ourselves about ourselves. "Yet," as he says, "to go part of that religious

*way,/ Is better than to rest,"* to give up as it were. There are the twin dangers of complacency, on the one hand, and self-righteous pride, on the other hand; the one about catering to our weaknesses, the other about presuming too much upon ourselves, forgetting that *"we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves"* as the Collect for *The Second Sunday in Lent* so rightly and convincingly puts it.

The paradox of Lent is that we strive to do what we know we cannot do ourselves but must try to do. Not only can we not reach Christ's fortieth day, more importantly, *"we cannot reach our Saviour's puritie."* "Yet," as he says again, *"are we bid, Be holy ev'n as he."* "In both," he says, *"let's do our best,"* doing our best to keep the feast of Lent as the poem names it and doing our best to be holy even as he is holy. What does this mean? It signals the nature of the Lenten pilgrimage of Love.

*"We go up to Jerusalem,"* Jesus says, as we hear on *Quinquagesima Sunday*. We go up, not I, not you, not just Christ, but *we* go up. The journey is to God and with God. Herbert notes that *"who goeth in the way which Christ hath gone,/ Is much more sure to meet with him, then one/ That travelleth by-ways."* The by-ways of our passions are *"the devices and desires of our own hearts"* as the General Confession of Sin puts it. What is wanted is our journeying with Christ so as to learn about ourselves more surely and about the love of God who seeks our good even through our evil.

Knowing that we are *"compos'd of passion"* and loving not *"temperance or Authoritie"* is one of the lessons of Lent. How are such lessons to be learned? One of the disciplines of Lent to which the Church bids us is *"reading and meditation upon God's holy Word."* The Scriptures are like a mirror in which to see ourselves and like a window through which to see God's love. Nowhere perhaps do we see this more wonderfully in the Old Testament than in the story of David.

The preacher, John Donne, has a number of sermons on some of the penitential psalms. There are seven psalms known as the penitential psalms: *Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130* and *143*. Donne preached about twenty-one sermons on the penitential psalms: six sermons on *Psalms 6*; eight on *Psalms 32*; six on *Psalms 38*, and one on *Psalms 51*. The Psalms are also called *The Psalms of David*, leaving aside whether or not he wrote any of them, and Donne draws upon that tradition of association in interpreting the psalm verses that provide the texts for his sermons. *Psalms 51* is the great penitential psalm of Lent and Donne draws explicitly upon the story of David in his sermon on *Psalms 51.7*.

The story of David is a compelling narrative. David is a kind of everyman. As Donne puts it, *"David's history concerne[s] and embrace[s] all. For his Person includes all states, between a shepherd and a King."* David is the little guy who takes down the big guy, the giant Philistine, Goliath, who has defied the God of Israel. A shepherd who has defended his flock from lion and bear and a warrior, too, at least with a sling-shot! He is as well a musician, playing the lyre that is able to soothe the troubled mind of King

Saul. More importantly, there is the theological theme that runs throughout the story of David. Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart. In the story of David we are allowed to see the heart that God sees. The story of David shows us how the Scriptures function as a mirror and a window, not only for David but for us. Just so is he a kind of everyman.

And, perhaps, most significantly, as a sinner. As Donne remarks, "*his sinne includes all sinne, between first Omissions, and complications of Habits of sin upon sin.*" David, in Donne's view, allows us to discover all "*the slippery ways into sin*" but also all "*the penitential ways out of sin.*"

David is the King of Israel who unites the tribes of Israel and makes Jerusalem the center or capital of the people of God. What is his story? "*It happened late one afternoon,*" the narrative in *Second Samuel* tells us in splendid lapidary prose, smooth and hard as a stone, understated and yet more powerful for being so. What happened? David, out walking on the flat roof-top of his palace, espies the beautiful Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, bathing on her roof-top. You have to be careful where you place your hot-tubs. He sees and lusts, he covets and desires; to cut to the chase, he has sex with her and she conceives. Now there's a problem! Sex in the city was never so riveting. Now what?

He recalls Uriah back from the battle with the Ammonites. He feasts and fêtes him and sends him down to his own house, anticipating that he will sleep with his wife and so the child will be able to be passed off as Uriah's. But Uriah is faithful to the warrior code and will not go in to his wife but sleeps on the doorstep as if he were in the field with his fellow warriors. Drats! Foiled! What is David to do? He conspires to have Uriah killed by sent into the place of fiercest fighting and then abandoned. As the text puts it in a wonderful economy of language, "*Uriah the Hittite was slain also.*"

But just consider. David has coveted Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. He has committed adultery. He has conspired to commit murder. Wow! But left at this we have only the slippery slopes of sin. The real interest of the narrative is how David comes to be convicted of his sins and by extension how we become convicted of sin and convinced of love.

The answer is through the parable of Nathan the prophet whom God sends to David. He tells a story. A rich man has many sheep; a poor man has but one little ewe lamb which he loves dearly. A visitor comes to the rich man who feels obliged to offer the rites of hospitality but instead of taking one of his own sheep, he takes the poor man's lamb. David is outraged at the obvious injustice and wrong of it all, to which Nathan famously says, "*You are the man!*"

David gets it and repents. *"I have sinned against the Lord."* He recognizes that he has betrayed God and his commandments. He has the strength of character to repent. Do we?

If we are defined simply by our actions we are all condemned. The greater mercy is our being convicted and repenting. In so doing we open ourselves out to the true worth and dignity of our humanity. It is found in the truth of God without which there can be no ethical awakening of our conscience. David gets this. Do we? If you do, *you da' man!*

A mirror and a window. We learn through the witness of the Scriptures about how we are *"compos'd of passion"* and resist the disciplines of *"temperance"* and the other virtues and resist even more the *"authoritie"* of God and his Church. But we learn even more the compassion of God who awakens us to our sins so that we can repent and be healed. David's story is not just about *"the slippery ways into sin"* but, more importantly, *"the penitential ways out of sin."* *"Against thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight,"* as *Psalms 51* so profoundly states, a psalm which is attributed to David's having been convicted and having confessed his sin.

Donne makes the point very clearly.

At last Nathan came; David did not send for him, but God sent him; But yet David laid hold upon Gods purpose in him. And he confesses to God, he confesses to the Prophet, he confesses to the whole Church; for, before he pleads for mercy in the body of the Psalme, in the title of the Psalme, which is as Canonically Scripture, as the Psalme itselfe, hee confesses himselfe plainly, *A Psalme of David, when the Prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

Donne has in mind the titles to the Psalms in the King James Version of the Bible. The Prayer Book uses the older Coverdale version of the Psalter and retains the Latin titles of the Psalms from their opening lines. Yet *Psalms 51* is the great penitential psalm of Lent and belongs to our penitential adoration of God in the awareness of his mercy and truth towards us. The association with David's story gives it greater poignancy and meaning.

In the story of David a mirror is held up for us to see ourselves and a window is opened for us to see the love of God who sees and knows us better than we do ourselves and whose love seeks our good. Such is the nature of penitential adoration. *"Welcome deare feast of Lent,"* indeed.

*Fr. David Curry*  
*Lenten Feria*  
*March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015*



### Third Address

The poets and preachers of our Anglican tradition help us in the spiritual journey of Lent by opening us out to the nature of penitential adoration. As Lancelot Andrewes notes in his Good Friday sermon of 1605, we are always to be "*looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith*" but most especially upon Christ crucified. Paul, he says, "*knew many, very many things*" yet he decided "*to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" "*The perfection of our knowledge is Christ; the perfection of our knowledge in or touching Christ, is the knowledge of His Cross and Passion.*" Somehow it is our comfort, the strengthening of our faith.

The Fourth Sunday marks the midpoint of the Lenten journey. Various known as *Mothering Sunday*, because of the Epistle reading from *Galatians* about "*Jerusalem which is above is free; which is the mother of us all,*" and *Refreshment Sunday*, because of the Gospel story from *John* about the feeding of the multitude in the wilderness, and *Laetare Sunday*, because of the Introit at Mass from *Isaiah 66. 10*, "*Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her,*" it recalls us to the end of the Lenten journey; in other words to its purpose and meaning. It opens us out to "*the comfort[s] of thy grace by which we may mercifully be relieved*" as the Collect for *The Fourth Sunday in Lent* puts it, even given the knowledge "*that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished.*" The juxtaposition of punishment and comfort is instructive about the dialectic of redemption.

Tonight, too, is *The Feast of St. Patrick*, which somehow cannot be allowed to pass without celebration, even in Lent! Yet, the Saints are part of our spiritual journey; "*the cloud of witnesses*" that compass us about in our "*running the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*"

George Herbert in his poem on *Lent* speaks of it as a "*deare feast.*" It is on *The Fourth Sunday in Lent* and the week which it graces that perhaps we get a glimpse of what that means. As he begins the very last poem of his collection of poems known as *The Temple*, a poem called *Love (III)*, "*Love bade me welcome*" and, indeed, that captures the meaning of Lent as the pilgrimage of Love. *Laetare Sunday* reminds us that the Love of God provides for us. The end of the journey is equally what sustains and provides for us in the way of the journeying. The *eschatological*, meaning the last things, and the *eucharistical*, pertaining to communion, are inescapably connected. They are about our being gathered to God. As Andrewes says in a Nativity Sermon "*even thus to be recollected at this feast by the Holy Communion into that blessed union, is the highest perfection we can in this life aspire unto. We then are at the highest pitch, at the very best we shall ever attain to on earth, what time we newly come from it; gathered to Christ, and by Christ to God.*"

The Lenten Sundays anticipate and prepare us for Holy Week. They do so by looking back to the stories of the Old Testament and by looking ahead to the events of Christ's

Passover, the events of Holy Week. The Fourth Sunday looks back to the provisions God makes for the people of Israel in the wilderness journey of the *Exodus* and looks ahead to the Last Supper. Part of the meaning of the Passion is found in the providence of God who provides for us, at once making so much out of so little and, even more, making something out of the destructive nothingness of human evil. The provisions extend beyond the events to become the means of our participation in the divine life here and now. Such is the meaning of our sacramental life.

Yet, for as Herbert says, "*Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back.*" Why? "*Guiltie of dust and sin.*" The imagery is profound. It recalls us to Creation and to the Fall, to our being the dust into which God has breathed his spirit and to our turning from God to the dust at the insinuations of the serpent. Even more, it reminds us of the words of the rituals of *Ash Wednesday* and the words from *Genesis* used in the imposition of ashes. "*Remember, O man, that dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.*" The story of redemption is about our being the dignified dust that God has embraced and made his own in Christ's Incarnation; dust that has a place in the heaven of God.

"*But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack/ From my first entrance in,/ drew nearer to me,*" the poem continues, rich in theological imagery. Love draws nearer to us even as we withdraw, "*guiltie of dust and sinne.*" There is the awareness in ourselves of the distance between God and us. "*But quick-ey'd Love*" draws near "*sweetly questioning,/ if I lack'd any thing.*" Divine love seeks us out, bids us welcome and sweetly questions us about our need. It is a powerful image about the Love of God who seeks our good and engages us in dialogue. Love in the poem is personified and put in capitals. Love is God.

In the second stanza, the individual soul, the first person voice of the poem, says in response to Love, "*A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here.*" Following upon the knowledge of being "*guiltie of dust and sinne,*" this is the knowledge of the self which is called *contrition*, a sense of sorrow and sadness and unworthiness which is constantly recalled in *The Prayer of Humble Access* in the communion liturgy of *The Book of Common Prayer*. "*We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, Trusting in our own righteousness ... We are not worthy So much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table.*" But "*Love said, You shall be he.*"

Love proclaims us worthy to be welcomed by Love. Yet the dialogue continues as the penitential "I" replies, "*I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare, I cannot look on thee.*" This is the moment of *confession*, the confession of our sins, of our unkindness and our lack of gratitude that makes us unable to look on Love. The response of Love here is wonderful. "*Love took my hand, and smiling did reply, / Who made the eyes but I?*" We are recalled to God as our Creator and ultimately to his purpose in our creation. But contrition and confession must be about a deeper understanding of what sin makes. John Donne recalls a famous saying of Augustine in one of his sermons on the penitential psalms. "*God makes man; man makes sin.*" Here the penitential "I" is convicted

of that truth, the truth of our untruth, and responds in the third stanza with the words "*Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them,*" acknowledging our misuse of God's creative gifts, and signaling the consequence of separation from God. "*Let my shame/ Go where it doth deserve.*" Contrition and Confession are here intimately connected.

Love answers with a question that opens us out to redemption, to the justifying righteousness of Christ, to the theology of atonement. "*And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?*" Through the witness of the Scriptures we are recalled and made aware of the Passion and Sacrifice of Christ. What we are meant to know is the divine love. That is meant to move our hearts beyond contrition and confession by opening us out to the theological theme of *satisfaction* as expressed for instance in the Eucharistic prayer that connects Communion with the Passion. "*Jesus Christ take[s] our nature upon him*" and "*suffer[s] death upon the Cross for our redemption; mak[ing] there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.*" Powerful language that, like the poem, signals the divine knowledge that moves our hearts beyond our own self-condemnation. The penitential "I" can now respond, "*My deare, then I will serve.*"

The image is that of serving at a table and recalls the story of Abram and the three men or Angels that are also said to be the Lord appearing to him "*under the shade of the oak of Mamre*" (*Genesis 18*). He offers hospitality but stands by and waits upon them. It is the setting for the promise of a son, the promised son, to Abram and Sara, his wife. Here, in Herbert's poem, *Love (III)*, the penitential "I" is moved at least to the idea of service. But no. Something more is given to us out of the Love of God, the love which "*bore the blame*" for our sins and follies. "*You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat.*" We are reminded of Christ's words and actions at the last Supper on the night of his betrayal, the eve of his Passion. We are recalled to Christ's service and sacrifice whose meat is to do the will of him who sent him.

*Contrition, Confession and Satisfaction* are the recurring patterns in our liturgy. They turn upon the interrelation of the doctrines of justification and sanctification. As John Donne remarks *Contrition, Confession and Satisfaction* belong to "*a perfect and entire repentance.*" Andrewes, too, speaks about the compunction that leads to comfort, to our being strengthened by the love of Christ pierced on the Cross. The compunction which complements the concept of contrition is about how we are pierced in contemplating Christ pierced on the Cross and find comfort in our sorrows. "*Comfort is it by which, in the midst of all our sorrows, we are comfortati, that is strengthened and made the better able to bear them all out.*" It requires our serious attention to the Passion which is exactly Andrewes' point.

When fixing both the eyes of our meditation "*upon Him That was pierced,*" – as it were one eye upon the grief [our contrition for what we have done that he suffers for us], the other upon the love wherewith He was pierced, we find by

both, or one of these, some motion of grace arise in our hearts; the consideration of His grief piercing our hearts with sorrow, the consideration of His love piercing our hearts with mutual love again. The one is the motion of compunction which they felt, who when they heard such things *"were pricked in their hearts."* The other, the motion of comfort which they felt, who, when Christ spake to them of the necessity of His piercing, said, *"Did we not feel our hearts warm within us?"* That, from the shame and pain He suffered for us; this, from the comforts and benefits He thereby procured for us.

The Scriptural references are to the story of Christ on the Road to Emmaus where he teaches us about the Resurrection by way of his Passion opening their eyes and making himself known to them *"in the breaking of the bread."*

Herbert's poem speaks at once of the heavenly banquet that is eschatological but is equally eucharistical. We journey with Christ, the journey is to God and with God. The food of our spiritual wayfaring is already the sacramental form of our participation in the love of God, the Love that bade us welcome. It is our comfort and our joy. And so we may say with the penitential "I" of Herbert's poem, *"So I did sit and eat."*

*Fr. David Curry*  
*The Feast of St. Patrick*  
*March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

## Fourth Address

The Lenten project of penitential adoration undergirds the whole life of Christian Faith but it reaches a kind of climax in Passiontide and especially in the events of Holy Week. As we have seen from some of the poets and preachers of the Anglican tradition, the Passion is a central concern throughout the whole of the Christian year and contributes to the understanding of the Christian pilgrimage of faith in terms of the interrelated principles of *justification* and *sanctification* as well as *glorification* that inform the character of spiritual life. At issue is the constant task of understanding the Passion which can only happen through our constant reflection upon it.

But "*they understood none of these things,*" Luke observes in the Gospel reading for *Quinquagesima Sunday*. What things? The things of the Passion. Jesus tells the disciples what will befall him in Jerusalem and yet "*they understood none of those things.*" Part of the Lenten journey is about seeing and understanding. It is not by accident that the Gospel reading continues with the story of the blind man on the roadside between Jericho and Jerusalem, symbolic of the earthly and the heavenly cities respectively. The purpose of going up to Jerusalem with Jesus is about seeing and understanding the Passion of Christ more and more clearly.

*The Annunciation* frequently falls within the season of the Passion. Mary responds to the angelic salutation that she is to be the *theotokos*, the God-bearer with a question, "*how shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*" Her question is not about doubting but about understanding what God seeks for our humanity. Her question leads to her 'yes' to God, her "*Be it unto me according to thy word.*" But that means as well a commitment to the constant learning about God's will and purpose for our humanity. As Simeon profoundly remarks at the occasion of Christ's presentation in the Temple, "*yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*" His words point already to the Passion and to our learning and understanding what it means both for Mary and about us and for us.

George Herbert's poem, *Prayer (1)*, provides a wonderful and rich collection of images that range over a broad spectrum of areas of thought and experience from the explicitly theological and biblical to the natural and the domestic. Yet the poem ends with the words "*something understood.*" Prayer is *something understood* in and through these images. Among the images in the sonnet is "*Christ-side-piercing spear / six-daies world transposing in an hour,*" juxtaposing the Passion and Creation and connecting them both to Christian worship by which we participate in Creation and Redemption. Prayer, after all, as the sonnet begins, is "*the Churches banquet, Angels age,/ God's breath in man returning to his birth.*"

Two of Lancelot Andrewes' Good Friday sermons emphasize our looking upon the Crucified, one through the text from *Hebrews*, "*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith,*" the other upon *Zechariah's* text, "*They shall look upon him whom they have*

*pierced.*" The conjunction of the Annunciation with Passiontide complements the ideas of beginnings and endings and Christ pierced upon the Cross. John Donne's poem *Upon the Annunciation and Passion falling upon one day. 1608* turns on the paradox of Christ coming to us in his Incarnation through Mary and his going from us into death through the Cross. The penultimate word of Christ on the Cross, his "it is finished," is yoked to Mary's fiat, her "be it unto me;" the whole story of Christ is seen as concentrated in the conjunction of these two moments.

At once a son is promised to her, and gone,  
Gabriel gives Christ to her, he her to John;  
Not fully a mother, she's in orbity [meaning in grief],  
At once receiver and the legacy;  
All this, and all between, this day hath shown,  
Th' abridgement of Christ's story, which makes one  
(As in plain maps, the furthest west is east)  
Of the angels' Ave, 'and Consummatum est.

The abridgement of Christ's story reveals the interplay of Passion and Annunciation, itself the beginning in time of Christ's incarnation. *The Annunciation* is his conception in Mary. The conjunction of that feast with *Good Friday* brings out the connection between them; each illumines the other without which neither is thinkable. The map imagery serves to underscore the connection as well for "as in plain maps," meaning flat maps and not a globe, "the furthest west is east," endings remain joined to their beginnings, each is present in the other.

In a Nativity sermon, Lancelot Andrewes observes the power of *concipiet* which is said scripturally and credally about Mary in contrast to such rhyming terms as *decipiet* and *recipiet*, deceiving and receiving in contrast to conceiving. "To conceive is more than to receive," he notes, "it is so to receive as we yield somewhat of our own also." Mary is not simply a passive vessel through whom God passes into our world. As he explains,

A vessel is not said to conceive the liquor that is put into it. Why? Because it yieldeth nothing from itself. The blessed Virgin is, and therefore is because she did. She did both give and take. Give of her own substance whereof His body was framed; and take or receive power from the Holy Ghost, whereby was supplied the office and the efficacy of the masculine seed. This is *concipiet*.

The point here is the full and free willing nature of Mary's participation in God's work of human redemption and the larger sense of theological anthropology which requires our participation in what God initiates and accomplishes. Only so can something be brought forth or born out of faith; *concipiet* leads to *pariet*. As Donne remarks, God will not save us without our wills, only through our wills; in short, our wills willing what God wills for us. The great exemplar of this is Mary. So too in Passiontide and Holy Week we are not merely passive spectators; our looking upon the Crucified is the activity of thinking faith, the form of our participation in work of human redemption,

especially through the sacraments. "*Christ-side-piercing spear*," to use Herbert's image, recalls the moment in the Passion where the dead Christ is pierced by the spear of the Roman soldier and "*forthwith came there out blood and water*," as John tells us. Following the doctrine of the Fathers, divines like Hooker, Andrewes and Donne understand this to symbolize the sacraments of holy Baptism and holy Communion.

Our looking upon Christ crucified is about *something understood* or at least about coming to understand. To conceive is also to understand. Donne plays upon this conceit, this idea, in a remarkably complex sonnet in a series of sonnets known as *La Corona*, seven sonnets in which the last line of each is the first line of the next forming a circle or a crown. The seven sonnets of *La Corona* emphasize certain doctrinal moments in the life of Christ envisioned as a complete whole, "*a crown of prayer and praise*" encompassing Annunciation, Nativity, Temple, Crucifying, Resurrection and Ascension which brings us around to "*this crown of prayer and praise*," the last line of the seventh sonnet returning us to the first line of the first.

In the sonnet entitled *Annunciation* in that series, Donne begins with the theme of human redemption. "*Salvation to all that will is nigh*," the sonnet begins. Salvation cannot be automatic; it is for all that will it; in other words, that want it. It is near but something is required of us, our desire for it. He plays on the different senses of "*all*." In the first line, *all* refers to everybody who wills but in the second line, "*That all, which always is all everywhere*" refers to God, "*that all*" in his ubiquity, eternity and self-sufficiency. God is always all God and always everywhere himself all God. This provides the platform for the paradox of redemption. "*Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear, which cannot die, yet cannot chose but die.*" But how is this redemption to be accomplished?

In the fourth line of the octet, the narrative voice addresses Mary, "*Lo, faithful Virgin*," echoing the angelic salutation to Mary. "*Lo, faithful Virgin, yields himself*," meaning that "*that all*," God, "*yields himself to lie/ in prison, in thy womb.*" The imagery is classical and patristic. God the Creator limits himself to his own creation; the idea of the divine condescension is emphasized as well as the paradox of the womb as prison, an enclosed space, but even more an intimate and material reality. "*Thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb*" as the *Te Deum* puts it. It is a way of signaling the wonder of the Incarnation but already in terms of bearing sin and choosing death, the themes of the Passion.

Donne proceeds to indicate his high doctrine of theological anthropology and of the pure humanity of Mary. He says "*and though he there/ Can take no sin*," meaning that God is without sin and cannot be tainted by sin by virtue of yielding himself to lie in Mary's womb, but even more "*nor thou give*," suggesting *The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception* which is about Mary herself being conceived without original sin because of her role and place in the economy of salvation. A controversial doctrine about which there was debate in the middle ages between Franciscans and Dominicans, the one for, the other against, it did not come to be a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church until

1854. It lacks any clear basis in Scripture – a limiting point for Anglicans and other churches of the Reformation – but there were reformed theologians who held to the idea but not as something to be required to be believed by all for just that reason. But in terms of understanding the Incarnation and Redemption, it contributes one approach to the mystery of salvation. Here Donne invokes the idea in relation to the themes of the Incarnation and the Passion.

The octet ends on this note: *“Yet he ‘will wear / taken from thence, flesh, which death’s force may try.”* God becomes man through Mary that he may encounter the power of death. Thus far in the sonnet, God has not been named as God or in the terms of the names of the divine persons. Indeed, the word God has not been mentioned, only indicated in terms of *“that all, which always is all everywhere.”* In the sestet, however, God is clearly identified in terms of the second person of the Trinity.

*“Ere by the spheres time was created, thou / Wast in his mind, who is thy son, and brother.”* Mary is understood to be in the mind of God from before the foundations of the earth, before the beginnings of time; in short, from eternity. She is in the divine mind of him who is her son and brother; Christ as Mary’s son, Christ as brother to all humanity. But even more and especially in terms of understanding, Donne plays upon the different sense of conception. *“Whom thou conceiv’st, conceived.”* Mary is intellectually conceived in the divine mind even as she conceived Christ in her womb. It is all part and parcel of *something understood.*

The sonnet doesn’t end there. *“Yea, thou art now / Thy maker’s maker, and thy father’s mother.”* The paradoxes of relation continue to build up as a way of explicating the mystery of human redemption in terms of Mary’s role as the Mother of God, the one through whom God becomes man. The sonnet ends with the contrast between light and dark, immensity and enclosure. *“Thou’ hast light in dark; and shutt’st in little room, / Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.”* Yet the whole sonnet shows the necessary interrelation of the Passion and the Incarnation and opens us out to the nature of our active participation in the work of human redemption.

Our *“looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”* in Lancelot Andrewes’ sermon on that text brings us to the image of Christ crucified. He explores the concepts of author and finisher thoroughly and exhaustively.

*“Author and Finisher”* are two titles, wherein the Holy Ghost oft setteth Him forth, and wherein He seemeth to take special delight. In the very letters, He taketh to Him the name of *“Alpha”* the Author, and again of *“Omega”* the Finisher of the alphabet. From letters go to words: there is He *Verbum in principio*, *“the Word at the beginning.”* And He is *“Amen”* too, the word at the end. From words to books. *In capite libri scriptum est de Me*, in the very *“front of the book”* He is; and He is Ἀνακεφαλαίωσις (Anakephalaiosis), *“the Recapitulation,”* of conclusion of it too. And so, go to persons: there he is *Primus et novissimus*, *“the first and the last.”* And from persons to things: and there He



is, “the beginning and the end;” whereof ἀρχή, “the beginning,” is in Ἀρχηγός, the Author; and τέλος, “the end,” is in Τελειωτής, the Finisher. The first beginning a Quo, He “*By whom all things are made;*” and the last end He, per or propter Quem, “*by, for, or through Whom*” all things are made perfect.”

It is a linguistical *tour-de-force*, explicating the range of meanings associated with the Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, going from these titles to letters, from letters to words, from words to books, from books to persons, from persons to things. And yet even this does not exhaust the complete range of consideration; it has to be brought to the Cross.

Were He “Author” only, it would serve to step forth well at the first. But He is “Finisher” too: therefore we must hold out to the last. And not rend one of them from the other, seeing He requireth both – not either, but both – and is indeed Jesus, a Saviour of none but those, that follow Him as “Finisher” too, and are therefore marked in the forehead with Tau the last letter of the Hebrew, as He Himself is Omega, the last of the Greek Alphabet.

He brings us to the Cross and to the sign of the Cross through something understood in our “*look[ing] upon him whom [we] have pierced,*” the text for his 1597 sermon on Good Friday. We are made participants in the Passion through the forms of our active looking upon the crucified. “*Look upon Him and be pierced,*” Andrewes exhorts us; “*look upon Him and pierce your sins*” which are the cause of Christ’s being pierced, he tells us; but above all, he says, “*look and be pierced with love of Him that so loved thee, that He gave Himself in this sort to be pierced for thee.*” In short, look and love.

The Passion helps us to understand the deep love of God for our humanity. “*He was pierced with love no less than with grief, and it was that wound of love made Him so constantly to endure all the other.*” That is why for Andrewes, “*Christ pierced on the cross is liber charitatis, ‘the very book of love’ laid open before us.*” Like Herbert’s image of “*Christ-side-piercing spear,*” so too with Andrewes by way of Bernard of Clairvaux, we come to “*something understood*” by our contemplation of the Passion of Christ. “*This love of His,*” Andrewes says, “*we may read in the cleft of His heart*” and goes on to quote Bernard, “*‘the point of the spear serves us instead of a key, letting us through His wounds see His very bowels’ the bowels of tender love and most kind compassion, that would for us endure to be so entreated.*” We look upon Him that we may understand something of the love of God for us.

Prayer, Herbert suggests in the last line of the octet of his sonnet, *Prayer (1)*, is “*a kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear.*” It complements the final two words of the sonnet, signaling to us about what is wanted in contemplating the Passion of Christ and in so doing, participating in its meaning. Only so can it begin to be “*something understood.*”

*Fr. David Curry*  
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