

April 5 – Saturday

He was destined before the foundation of the world,
but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.
Through him you have come to trust in God,
who raised him from the dead and gave him glory,
so that your faith and hope are set on God.

1 Peter 1:20-21

Opening my email in the morning at times disturb me. I got all kinds of mails – greetings, jokes, announcements of events and happenings, letters from friends but what tips me off are mails about rumors. Rumors circulated as 100% true and therefore require your attention and call for your immediate action, the least of which is to forward it to your friends. A number of this email excites the element of fear deep within us. Though it is not openly expressed but the message implies mistrust and will eventually tear us apart from each other either in our small or in the larger global community.

So how shall we deal with our fears? Circulating unfounded stories and fanning the flames of fear is one option. Most often it comes to many of us with just a click on the mouse – forward it and it's all over. The other option is to take time to be silent, to absorb, to pray, and to put everything into perspective and to remember as what Peter wrote that “our faith and hope are set on God,” who through Jesus revealed to us how to deal the world. So let us set our eyes on him, learn from him and passed on what we discover as we put our trust in the Lord.

***Prayer: Draw us to the center of our faith
when we drift away from You, O God. Amen.***

April 4 – Friday

Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.
O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant,
the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.

Psalm 116:15-16

I remember this verse as one of the favorites for tombstone – “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.” In another translation (NJB) the word used is costly. How can death be precious or costly like a coveted stone or a rare jewel? Reading this verse in the season of Easter brings to mind the death of Christ on the cross. That was a costly death, a precious one.

As pointed out powerfully by theologians; “The very heart of the Christian gospel is that, by Christ’s bloody death, the blessings of a new and incorruptible life were purchased for all who believe in him. “Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission [of sins]” (Hebrews 9:22). And without the remission of sins, there is no life. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23); and it is only when this requirement of death is fulfilled that eternal life can be freely given to God’s elect.” (The Blood of the Martyrs, Reformation Theology) How costly and precious that death was, but through the cross of Christ, we are ushered into the empty tomb, the resurrected life that is beyond the reach of the power of death – life in all its fullness, life that is eternal in Christ, with Christ and for Christ!

***Prayer: Thank you God for the costly death of
Jesus on the cross that provided us the
precious gift of the resurrection-life. Amen.***

April 3 – Thursday

I will lift up the cup of salvation

and call on the name of the LORD,

I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.

Psalm 116: 13-14

Refrain is a word that we encounter in music. It comes from the Old French refraindre "to repeat," or likely from Vulgar Latin refringere. Refrain is the line or lines that are repeated in music or in verse; refrain is the "chorus" of a song. Verses 13-14 is the refrain of this Psalm, the lines are repeated in verses 17-19. The Psalmist made a definite and intentional choice to respond to the Lord's goodness and grace; lifting the cup of salvation, calling the name of the Lord, paying vows to the Lord – in the presence of all his people. He adds in v. 19 – "in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem."

Gratitude to God finds its full expression "in the presence of all his people." The faith that we share is "personal but not private." We can pray and meditate all by ourselves but the faith that is passed on to us has a corporate character. It overflows in reverent worship and joyful service. Poets said: A bell is not a bell until you ring it, a song is not a song until you sing it, and love is not love, until you give it away. It is also true with our faith – until it finds expression "in the presence of all his people."

***Prayer: Lead me O God
to express my gratitude to you –
in the presence of all your people. Amen.***

April 2 – Wednesday

**What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?**

Psalm 116:12

Questions are great tools of inquiry and also essential starting points in any undertaking. Scientific experiments are done in search of answers to questions asked. I believe this is also true for theology, our human attempt to explain our relationship with the Divine. One of the important dimensions of theology is not just providing answers but also helping us ask the right questions. For the answers we seek are determined first of all by the questions we ask.

The late President John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country,” a powerful starting point when talking about responsible citizenship. The Psalmist question – “what shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?” – is a thoughtful theological starting point. The writer starts not by asking “what can I get from God?” There is already a defined framework acknowledging God’s bounty. It makes a lot of difference when we approach God in the spirit of gratitude and with a grateful heart. Remember that old Visayan hymn “ihapa ang panalangin mo...” (count your blessings) and as we count it one by one, the question that we should be asking is the one that the Psalmist proposes, “What shall I return to the Lord...”

Prayer:

***Help us O God, not only to find the answers to the questions we are asking but above all help us shape the right questions.
Amen.***

April 1 – Tuesday

The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.
Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, save my life!"

Psalm 116:3-4

When telegraph communication was discovered and widely used as a communication tool, a distress signal was developed in what people then called as the Morse code. During emergencies, radio operators sent the letters SOS. Although it has no meaning but people associate it as an acronym of the words "Save Our Souls" or "Save our Ship." Many lives were saved from death because of this easily recognizable signal of three dots and three dashes.

The Psalmist sent not an SOS but an SML (Save my life) signal to the Lord when the snares of death and the pangs of Sheol (the place of the dead) was about to pull him to its fold. Looking in retrospect, how terrifying that experience had been for him and for many who call this experience as "near death" or "close call." It happens to many of us, some physical in nature others in some other forms; close calls to a ruin relationship and a shattered faith, near death experience of business or a career, etc.

Experiences like these serve as a turning point for many. A sense of openness and awareness of God's power to save becomes stronger. Many rediscover God as the source of strength and life in the midst of distress. So like the Psalmist while in anguish who prayed, Lord, save my life, this can also be our prayer today, whatever it means in the context of our journey in faith.

Prayer: ***"Lord, save my life!" Amen.***

March 31 – Monday

I love the LORD,
because he has heard my voice and my supplications.
Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live

Psalm 116:1-2

The phrase “incline his ear to me” reminds me of the line in the prayer response that we sing in church, “Hear, our prayer, O Lord, incline thine ear to us and grant us thy peace.” To incline one’s ear means to listen willingly or favorably to another’s plea. The writer of this Psalm experienced God in this manner, the God who did not only listen but the God who listens willingly and favorably. It also implies that the God who listens is the God who is alive and not dead! Let us take the cue from the Psalmist, let us speak to the Lord and express not only our needs, our pains, our questions but also our hopes and our joys in life. For truly we have a God who listens when we speak.

Prayer:

Thank you God for listening to us when we speak. May we also listen to you when you speak to us, Amen.