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A Week Like and Unlike Any Other

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This is a week both *like* and *unlike* any other. Holy Week is a week like any other in that we live, sleep, work, and play, and do much of what we would normally do in any other week of our lives.

But it is also a week unlike any other because it is meant to be set apart for a specific purpose.

That purpose is to pause in our everyday lives and pray, worship, and reflect on the way of the cross, the only way that can lead to salvation for the world. This is a week for us to remember and experience in some way the extravagant gift of grace and new life that was opened to us in Jesus Christ.

In this particular year, we find ourselves in a strange place. It feels different in many ways from Holy Week 2020 in that then, we were just beginning to feel the effects of the pandemic on our lives, not knowing what was ahead. A year later as the pandemic continues, we have been through so much as a world, all the while knowing that there is light on the horizon.

Last week, as I was catching up with a friend, I realized just how much has happened even recently. James and I received our first COVID vaccines, feeling immensely humbled and grateful. We know that there are still so many in our nation and around the world waiting anxiously to be vaccinated. The news reflects both stories of hopefulness and people sacrificing time and energy out of love for their neighbors, and continued stories of racism, gun violence, and needless tragedy.

So, we find ourselves again at Holy Week. If you are like me, you may feel burned out a bit and ready to once again be with people as we were able to be in the past. You may feel caught off guard by how quickly we have arrived at Holy Week and soon, Easter.

When Jesus was making his way to the cross, it was both a time like any other and a time unlike any other. People celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions. They sold their goods in the marketplaces; ate with their families; toiled over their work.

Little did they know that the Lord of all Creation was headed to a most certain death. In the moment of his death, Jesus destroyed the power of sin, evil, and death to have the final word. Life would never be the same, and three days later, Jesus would rise again and open the way for us to new life in Him.

But first, there was mourning. First, his followers experienced confusion, exhaustion, and sadness. They had to experience mourning before there was rejoicing.

It is normal for us to want to jump ahead and skip the “sad parts” of Holy Week. After all, haven’t we had enough sadness this past year? Yet it is necessary for us to pause in our everyday, normal lives and experience the breadth of emotions tied into this week. We have little to celebrate if we have not first been able to grieve.

As I was reflecting on how our everyday lives bump up against Holy Week, I remembered a passage from the prophet Isaiah writing about God ushering in the new creation. He prophesies about what the new creation will look like when we one day experience it completely:

“See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind...

I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;

the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.” (Isaiah 65:17; 19-20)

Jesus has done something new in his cross and Resurrection, and we see glimpses of that new creation even now. Notice those glimpses. Notice how you feel this week as you worship with the Church and in your daily life.

Most especially, remember what Jesus has done for you and for the whole world, in this week that is both like and unlike any other.