



“Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Symbols of the Paschal Mystery – Bishophurst Chapel

Holy Week, 2023

Dear friends in Christ,

Holy Week has begun and we, with Christians around the world, will commemorate the paschal mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a week of poignancy, tragedy, sadness, and triumph as we follow Jesus from his triumphal entry in Jerusalem to the hill where he is crucified and finally laid to rest in a borrowed tomb.

We know the story doesn't end there. When the women go to the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the week the monument to death is empty. Jesus is Risen so that we may have life – wonderful, abundant life, not only in eternity, but also here and now.

You are invited to journey with Jesus and your fellow parishioners in your own parish churches this Holy Week. Clergy and lay leaders have been preparing for the Triduum commemorations and want you to be with them to enter fully into each liturgy as the drama unfolds. There will be tears, for there are always tears when someone dies, but we will also witness a love 'so amazing, so divine' that it will demand a response from us.

As we gather to watch, pray, and listen we will encounter the whole range of humanity at its best and at its very worst. We will witness politicians and religious officials giving into pressure. We will see frightened disciples crumpling under the strain of it all. We will see the trial judge incapable of making a decision as he vacillates between innocence and guilt under the weight of public pressure. We will see a repentant thief being offered eternal life and a Roman soldier finding faith. We will watch a faithful few remaining by Jesus's side to the end and a new family coming into being.

Know this – though on the surface it looks as if Jesus is a victim of fate and circumstance, deep down he is firmly in charge of his life, his vocation, his mission and yes, even his death. Despite the illusion of power on the part of the forces of evil, Jesus gives his life freely – no one takes it from him. Jesus will die, but not without purpose. His death is full of meaning and purpose for the redemption of the world God loves, and this includes us.

This week we are being invited to walk the road of suffering and death with Jesus so that we may also share in the new life offered by our triune God. We are invited to be one with Jesus, to be loved by Jesus, to be forgiven by Jesus, to come to know Jesus more fully, to trust in Jesus, to believe in Jesus, to love Jesus, and to do the things that Jesus does. What an invitation this is!

One of the most poignant moments in Holy Week for me takes place on Thursday evening. Jesus wraps a towel around his waist and takes a basin of water and a towel and begins to wash his disciples' feet. One of them, Peter, objects to having his feet washed but Jesus insists, saying, "Unless I wash you, you have no share of me." (John 13.)

To have a 'share' with Jesus is to share the love that exists between the Father and the Son and the fullness of life that is in this relationship. It is also to become part of a community known as the *Summit of Love* - love for God, love for one another, love for the world.

This means doing the things that Jesus does, like washing the feet of those around us. In our context foot washing means humble loving service, the kind we see all around our diocese as we work in foodbanks and soup kitchens, deliver meals to the bereaved, visit the sick and dying, welcome the stranger into our midst, and pray with the lost and the lonely.

To have a 'share' with Jesus in the Christian family is to be the primary sign that we really are disciples of Jesus, learning from him, imitating him, following him, and being inspired by him. It also means being prepared for what happened to Jesus -experiencing opposition, hatred, suffering and maybe even death.

When we are part of God's ongoing love story it may look like a story where evil has the upper hand, where despair is stronger than faith, where doubt creeps in at every turn. But really, deep down this is the same story that the Gospel writers have been telling us all along, it is the good news of Jesus the Messiah, of Emmanuel, "God is with us." (Matt. 1.23) God is with us this Holy Week, through the Easter season and always.

May this good news spill over into your hearts and homes, your churches, and communities this Holy Week and may you come to know with all the saints, "what is the breadth and length and depth and height" (Eph. 3.18) of Christ's love for you so you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I remain your grateful bishop in Christ,

+*Anne: Algoma*