

A Commentary and Guide to “A Journey of Passion”

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A journey into spiritual experience and trauma may seem disorienting, like entering an ancient labyrinth. We push ahead into the twists and turns, concentrating so much on where we are going that we don't notice the walls we are passing or the marks left on them by the generations who traveled before us. Even if we did stop, we might not be able to read and understand the markings. They may seem like remnants of a lost language, or one that we remember only through faint impressions.

Perhaps many of the references in the main story of “[A Journey of Passion](#)” are familiar to you; others might sound remote, mixed with childhood associations or relatively meaningless to our modern lives. Christians are often surprised to learn about the full extent of the anti-Jewish past; Jews who have closed the door on Christianity may not know about Christian spiritual traditions or about post-Holocaust re-interpretations, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church.

For this reason, these notes are intended to provide context. They might serve as the remarks of tour guides who shine a light onto the walls to point out what we miss as we pass along.

You may prefer to read the story on its own, free of distractions, or you may find that reading these notes alongside it provides a reflective backdrop, a second level of meaning, the way the rabbinic commentaries are consulted in parallel to the main text.

I speak in both the notes and the main story from the perspective of the Roman Catholic tradition, partly because it is my tradition and the one I understand best, and partly because it is the Christian tradition that is most compromised by its anti-Jewish history.

The inevitable consequence of a faith commitment is that some of you, Christian, Jew, or atheist, may not find your understanding of your faith reflected here. I apologize in advance and invite you to respond.

Your thoughts will be most welcome.

the Palm Sunday celebration —

For Roman Catholics, Palm Sunday marks the halfway point and the convergence of the three related but distinct aspects of the Christian religious life: the biblical story, the Church liturgical year and the individual's spiritual journey toward God.

In the biblical story, this Sunday commemorates Jesus's entry into Jerusalem to the acclaim of crowds waving palm branches. It initiates Jesus's last days that are recounted in the New Testament stories of his trial, his crucifixion and burial.

In the Church's liturgical year, Palm Sunday closes the season of Lent and begins Holy Week and the *triduum*. This is the Mass commemorated over three days: Jesus' Last Supper on Holy Thursday, his crucifixion on Good Friday and his entombment during Holy Saturday. The week ends with the celebration of his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

The **Catholic Encyclopedia of 1917** calls Palm Sunday "a Sunday of the highest rank." It says that the Eastern Orthodox churches "celebrate the day with great solemnity; they call it *kyriake* or *heorte ton baion* or *heorte baiophoros* (the feast of Palm-bearing) or also Lazarus Sunday, because on the day before they have the feast of the resuscitation of Lazarus."

Along with these communal and outward aspects of the Christian experience, individual Catholics are expected to follow an interior journey as well. They pray, take the Eucharist and practice self-examination and confession through the year to unite their hearts with Jesus and the community in his journey during his life. By now, they have become accustomed to praying with Jesus' presence in the weekly readings at Mass.

Suddenly, Palm Sunday and Holy Week thrust them into what Catholic mystical tradition calls the second conversion, or the "passive purgation of the senses." At the moment of greatest triumph, disaster strikes. Jesus vanishes. Confusion reigns. All assumptions collapse.

In their prayer life, spiritual Christians experience the complete destruction of their interior world, "the crushing of their sensibility." The Holy Week reveals to them, as it did to the original disciples, that their deepest motives for seeking God have been self-centered. At the critical moment, they choose themselves and abandon God.

This triggers utter desolation, and they enter a "dark night of the senses," or perhaps better called the "dark night of the ego," because they find in themselves that "strange but not uncommon mixture of sincere love of God with an inordinate love of self," as **Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange has described it**. "The soul loves God more than itself ... but it has not yet reached the stage of loving itself in God and for His sake" (*The Three Conversions*, page 37).

This is a difficult but essential experience if they are to become emptied of themselves enough to receive a flow of infinite love and experience a radical transformation of personality at Pentecost.

the most sacred portion —

The Christian year may be identified in the culture with Christmas and Easter, but from a religious perspective, the eight-week period from the resurrection at Easter to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is what rescues the individual from the prison of the self. This liberation to the freedom of a new life in God is the culmination of Jesus's gift to humanity. According to **Abbot Guéranger**: "The

Paschal time, from Easter Sunday to the Saturday after Pentecost is the most sacred portion of the Liturgical Year, and the one towards which the whole Cycle converges.”

this journey of passion.... the social symbols –

Like many religions, Christianity has several variants. Acculturated Christianity blends with the dominant culture. It surrenders its symbols of humility and sacrifice to a worldly culture that uses social power and status to magnify the importance of the self through the domination and devaluing of others. Intellectual Christianity insists on the conformance to orthodox (from Greek for “right-opinion”) beliefs and the acceptance of outward practices. Mystical Christianity focuses on developing the interior life, aligning the individual’s heart toward God and orthopraxis (from Greek for “right-action). It’s up to the individual Christian to choose his or her form of participation.

the liturgical color of the day –

The seasons of the Church’s liturgical year representing the stages of the spiritual journey are symbolized in the changing colors of the robes worn by Roman Catholic priests for Mass: Violet, or dark blue for the preparation and anticipation of Advent (from Latin for “arrival”) of Jesus; white for the joy of new hope at his birth at Christmas; green for the fruitfulness of his earthly life; violet again for the penitential period of Lent; and white again for the Easter resurrection. Red is for Palm Sunday, the crucifixion on Good Friday and Pentecost, the sacred feasts that bracket the holy season.

The Catholic Encyclopedia discusses the color symbolism: “The variety of liturgical colors in the Church arose from the mystical meaning attached to them. Thus white, the symbol of light, typifies innocence and purity, joy and glory; red, the language of fire and blood, indicates burning charity and the martyr’s generous sacrifice; green, the hue of plants and trees, bespeaks the hope of life eternal; violet, the gloomy cast of the mortified, denotes affliction and melancholy; while black, the universal emblem of mourning, signifies the sorrow of death and the somberness of the tomb.”

waving the branches of palms —

From ancient times, the celebration of victory over enemies was symbolized by the waving of palm branches. Jewish and Christian tradition has used palms to celebrate the defeat of spiritual enemies. In 1 Maccabees 13:51, the Jews entered the citadel of Jerusalem “with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.”

Jewish reflections in *Midrash Tehillim* say:

“The Sages interpreted our waving of the *lulav* [willow branches] on Sukkot as signifying the victory of the Jews over Satan on the Days of Judgment that precede the festival.”

“When Hoshanah Rabbah comes, they take willows, and make seven circuits around the synagogue, while the Hazzan of the synagogue stands like an angel of G-d, holding a Torah scroll in his arms as the people march around him as around the altar.”

“For thus our Rabbis taught: every day it was customary to circle the altar reciting, ‘Please, O Lord, deliver us; please, O Lord, bring success,’ and on the seventh day they would march around seven times, as King David said explicitly, as it is written, ‘I wash my hands in innocence, and walk around Your altar’ (Ps. 26:6). Immediately the ministering angels rejoice and proclaim, ‘The people of Israel are victorious.’”

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that Christian tradition also uses palms “as an emblem of joy and victory over enemies” or, in Christian symbolism, “a sign of victory over the flesh and the world.” Palms allude to Psalm 92:12 — “The righteous will flourish like the palm” – and so are especially associated with the memory of the martyrs.

“The emperors used to distribute branches of palm and small presents among their nobles and domestics.... Because every great feast was in some way a remembrance of the resurrection of Christ and was in consequence called *Pascha*, we find the names *Pascha floridum*, in French *Pâques fleuries*, in Spanish *Pascua florida*, and it was from this day of 1512 that our State of Florida received its name.... The palms blessed on Palm Sunday were used in the procession of the day, then taken home by the faithful and used as a sacramental. They were preserved in prominent places in the house, in the barns, and in the fields, and thrown into the fire during storms. On the Lower Rhine the custom exists of decorating the grave with blessed palms. From the blessed palms the ashes are procured for Ash Wednesday.”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

The cry of acclaim by the people as Jesus entered Jerusalem:

Matthew 21:8-10: “Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’ And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, ‘Who is this?’”

In Jewish synagogues, the Hebrew word *חַשְׁשָׁנָה* or *hosha‘-na* (“Save us, please”) is a refrain recited in the procession during Sukkot. The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshanah Rabbah, the great Hoshanah.

In *Sowing the Seeds: Life and Times of the Early Church*, one Christian blogger asks: “How did [Hoshanah] move from Jewish usage to Christian usage? ... Hosanna was an exclamation of joy and triumph. Like all acclamations in frequent use, it lost its primary meaning and became a kind of hurrah of joy, triumph and exultation.”

A colt with a robe across —

These were deliberately messianic symbols that Jesus used at his entrance into Jerusalem:

Mark 11:1-2, 7: “And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it.’ ... And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it [... and entered Jerusalem.]”

John 12:14-15: “And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it; as it is written, ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass’s colt!’”

The New Testament writers are referring to the words in Zechariah 9:9: “ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.”

“He’s bleeding!”

Jesus’ crucifixion begins with the Roman punishment of a severe beating:

John 19:1: “Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him.”

Matthew 27:27-31: “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.”

women crying and reaching out to him —

Luke 23:27-29: “And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!’”

ravaged wounds from dogs –

The early Christians were persecuted under **eleven Roman emperors** by crucifixion, execution, and exposure to wild animals in Rome's Coliseum. Emperor Nero started the first after a devastating fire in Rome: historian Suetonius said Christians were "covered with the skins of wild beasts and torn by dogs; were crucified and set on fire, that they might serve for lights in the night-time... Sometimes they were covered with wax or other combustible materials after which a sharp stake was put under their chins, to make them stand upright, and they were burnt alive, to give light to the spectators (at the games in the Circus)."

One estimate puts the number of Christians killed during **the persecutions** at 3,000, but this has been highly contested and is most likely unknown.

This symbol glowed and shimmered in the noon-day sun –

Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in its waning days under Emperor Constantine. The story of Constantine's conversion has many versions. According to Catholic historian Thomas:

"When Constantine finally emerged victorious in 312 CE he attributed his victory to the help of the Christian God. According to the Christian writer Lactantius (died 320 CE) on the eve of Constantine's fateful battle with Maxentius, Constantine had a vision of Christ, who told him to ornament the shields of his soldiers with the Savior's monogram — the Greek letters chi and rho. Constantine obeyed and in the ensuing battle was victorious as promised. Writing somewhat later, Eusebius, in his *Life of Constantine*, gave a more sensational account: Constantine and his whole army saw a luminous cross appear in the afternoon sky with the message, 'In this conquer.'"

They're massacring the villagers and burning the towns ... driven to mass killing of their children and themselves —

During the Crusades of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, European armies were summoned by the Roman Catholic popes to conquer Jerusalem from the Moslems, and as they marched, bands of soldiers joined with mobs to massacre the Jewish inhabitants of towns throughout France and Germany if they did not convert to Christianity. **Rabbi Dan Sherbok Cohn** reports what an eleventh-century observer wrote: "An enormous host coming from all regions and all nations, went in arms unto Jerusalem and obliged the Jews to be baptized, massacring by the thousands those who refused. Near Mainz, 1,014 Jews, men, women and children, were slaughtered, and the greatest part of the city burned" (*The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism*, page 41).

In many cases, mob violence took over in spite of the efforts of local bishops and archbishops to protect their local Jewish populations. **Historians Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx** describe: "The bishops John at Spire, Adalbert at Worms, Ruthard at Mayence, in response to the solicitations of such Jewish leaders as Moses son of Jekuthiel and Calonymus son of Meshullam, did what was in their power to safeguard Jewish lives and property.... The mob overpowered the Jews themselves, though some of them offered armed resistance, and intimidated their protectors."

In Spires, the local bishop took “quick and effective action” to seize and punish the guilty and so frightened the mob away. But in Worms, the mob surrounded the bishop’s palace, where Jews had taken refuge. “After a heavy combat, they penetrated within and slew all; many Jews had slain their children and then themselves.”

The archbishop and 300 armed men tried but were unable to protect another group of Jews. “However, the villagers and the rabble which soon followed could not be fought off. The Jews then proceeded to lay hands on themselves; Calonymus slew his own son Joseph” (pages 360-362).

hundreds of thousands of people speaking a mixture of languages –

Marx and Margolis recount the expulsions of Jews from Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. England expelled its Jewish citizens in 1290, France in 1306, Austria in 1420; Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1496.

threw them in cages or tied them to stakes and burned them alive –

Historian Cecil Roth cites a wide range of estimates of those killed during the Roman Catholic Church’s Inquisition from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries in Spain and Portugal and their colonies. One high, but most likely exaggerated, estimate is a total of 341,000 victims, which includes 32,000 burned and about 300,000 forced to confess and repent. He sides with a much smaller estimate of 30,000 victims, including 2,000 burned in auto-da-fé. When he wrote his book in 1932, he noted: “Since history began, perhaps in no spot on the earth’s surface has so systematic and so protracted a persecution ever been perpetrated for innocent a cause” (*A History of the Marranos*, page 145).

wildfires had broken out in the fields –

Saul Friedlander is a Jewish historian whose parents were murdered in the Holocaust in spite of several attempts to escape. Friedlander himself survived by hiding in France and adopting a Catholic name and identity, which he shed after the war. He **describes** the anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s as the consequence of the late phase in what he calls “the crisis of liberalism in Continental Europe”:

“This crisis of liberalism and the reaction against communism as ideological sources of anti-Semitism, pushed to their extreme on the German scene, became increasingly virulent throughout Europe, the Nazi message thus garnering a positive response from many Europeans and a considerable phalanx of supporters beyond the shores of the old Continent....

“Moreover, anti-liberalism and anti-communism corresponded to the stances adopted by the major Christian churches, and traditional Christian anti-Semitism easily merged with and bolstered the ideological tenets of various authoritarian regimes, of fascist movements and partly of some aspects of Nazism. Finally, this very crisis of liberal society and its ideological underpinnings left the Jews

increasingly weak and isolated throughout a continent where the progress of liberalism had allowed and fostered their emancipation and social mobility.

“This anti-Jewish frenzy at the top of the Nazi system was not hurled into a void. From the fall of 1942, Hitler often designated the Jew as the ‘**world arsonist**.’”

In fact, the flames that the Nazi leader set alight and fanned burned as widely and as intensely as they did only because, throughout Europe and beyond, for the reasons previously mentioned, a dense underbrush of ideological and cultural elements was ready to catch fire. Without the arsonist the fire would not have started; without the underbrush it would not have spread as far as it did and destroyed an entire world.”

grown into the millions –

The Nazi genocide against the Jews destroyed the 1,000-year culture of Eastern European Jewry in three years. It murdered an estimated 6 million people, a third of all Jews worldwide, including most of the oldest Jewish communities throughout Europe.

they were twenty to a room –

During the war, the Nazis created ghettos for Jews in most of the major cities throughout Poland after their invasion. These were at the last stage of persecution before extermination in the death camps. Friedlander reports that in 1940, the Nazi armies herded 400,000 Jews into the Warsaw ghetto and sealed it against exit:

“In March 1941, the population density of the Warsaw ghetto reached 1,309 persons per hundred square meters, with an average of 7.2 persons sharing one room, compared to 3.2 persons sharing one room in the “Aryan” sections of the city. These were average figures, for as many as 25 or even 30 people sometimes shared one room 6 by 4 meters. By all accounts the Warsaw ghetto was a **deathtrap** in the most concrete, physical sense. But cutting Warsaw off from the world also meant destroying the cultural and spiritual center of Polish Jewry and of Jewish life well beyond.”

the smell of burning flesh and bodies putrefying in lime –

The inhumanity of the Holocaust is beyond description. Death came from firing squads, gas chambers, open pits, starvation, overwork, untreated disease and overcrowded transportation.

In one case, 1,450 people had died during their transit among 6,700 brought in forty-five train cars to the Belzec death camp, according to **a report after the war by SS officer Kurt Gerstein**.

Some transport cars had a three-inch layer of caustic **quicklime on the floor** to prevent contamination, according to a **Catholic member of the Polish underground** who infiltrated Belzec at the request of the Warsaw Judenrat. The passengers were “literally burned to death, the flesh eaten away from the bones.” Some of the stories in Friedlander’s *The Years of Extermination* are more like descriptions of hell: “Near Kiev in 1941, German soldiers shot 800 to 900 local Jewish parents. Their children were abandoned without food or water in a building on the outskirts of town.... Soon the screams of these ninety children became so unbearable that the soldiers called in two field chaplains, a Protestant and a Catholic to take some ‘remedial action.’ The chaplains found the children half naked, covered with flies and lying in their own excrement. Some of the older ones were eating mortar off the wall; the infants were mostly comatose.... On August 22 [three days later] the children were executed. The (German Army) Wehrmacht had already dug a grave. The children were brought along in a tractor... lined up along the top of the grave and shot so that they fell into it... The wailing was indescribable.”

confess with your lips and believe in your heart

This is a familiar refrain from some fundamentalist Christians and missionaries who are seeking converts.

Romans 10:8-11: “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart [that is, the word of faith which we preach]; because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’”

But no one listened –

The Holocaust destroyed Jewish populations of Europe, but it also damaged the moral credibility of Christianity itself. After the Holocaust, no Christian can honestly re-adopt the naïve triumphalism of Christianity that motivated the Crusades, the Inquisition, or the pogroms and anti-Jewish marginalization. The Holocaust revealed the emptiness of the Christianity professed by its adherents in Europe.

Many in the pews feel the crack in this foundation of Christianity to this day; and many theologians are struggling with it. Fr. Edward Flannery, a Catholic priest and author of *The Anguish of the Jews*, has **interpreted** anti-Semitism as anti-Christianity: “The anti-Semite, not the Jew, is the real Christ-killer. He thinks he’s religious, but that’s a self-delusion. Actually he finds religion so heavy a burden, he develops ‘Christophobia.’ He’s hostile to the faith and has an unconscious hatred of Christ, who is for him, Christ the Repressor. He uses anti-Semitism as a safety valve for this hostility and is really trying to strike out at Christ.”

We must ask: Do baptism and Eucharist really transform people as advertized? Does faithful Church participation work? Or is something much more radical and challenging really required of anyone claiming to “take up their cross” and follow Christ? If so, has the Church shirked its responsibility to make this clear to those who fill up the pews?

What are you talking about? –

Just after the crucifixion and the scattering of the disciples, two were on a road to an outlying town. Jesus, at first unrecognizable, walked up and acted as if he knew nothing about what had happened to him:

Luke 24:13-19: That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And he said to them, 'What things?'"

merciful and gracious God —

These are the first two of the thirteen attributes of God's compassion that are basic to Jewish faith and frequently sung in services as "*Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum.*"

The [Jewish Encyclopedia](#) cites the following verses as their source:

Exodus 34:6-8: "The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped."

We expected he would free us from our oppressors –

Luke 24:19-21: "And [On road to Emmaus] he said to them, 'What things?' And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.'"

Acts 1:6-7: "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.'"

The blood of the innocents is crying out –

Genesis 4:10-13 "And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.' Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.'"

“May His great name be magnified ... in the world He created by His will ...” –

These words begin Mourner’s Kaddish, recited at Jewish Shabbat services for those mourning the dead: The English words in the story translate the Aramaic original: *“Yit’gdal v’yit’kadash sh’mei rabbah, ... b’al’ma di v’ra khir’utei.”*

tortured to death and still praised God –

The Babylonian **Talmud** tells the story that when Rabbi Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for him to recite the Shema, the most basic Jewish prayer. While the Romans combed his flesh with iron combs as punishment for joining the Bar Kochba rebellion, he was “accepting upon himself the kingship of Heaven.”

His disciples marveled at his tenacity even at the point of death. He replied that he had always wondered how he would completely fulfill the command of the Shema from Deut. 6:4-5: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

“All my days, I have been troubled by this verse — “with all thy soul, (which I interpret) even if He takes thy soul.’ I said, “When will I have the opportunity of fulfilling this?” Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it?” He prolonged the word “אחד” – (the Hebrew word for “one” at the beginning of the Shema) — until he expired saying it...”

The Talmud says that the angels proclaimed: “Happy thou art, R. Akiva, that thou art destined for the life of the world to come” (Berachoth 61b).

would that not have been enough? —

This comes from the refrain, **Dayenu!** – Hebrew for “It would have been enough for us” — sung during prayers at Pesach, the Jewish Passover. The lines praise God’s action during the Exodus and liberation from the Pharaoh:

“If he had brought us out of Egypt and had not carried out judgments against them — Dayenu!”

“If he had carried out judgments against them and not against their idols — Dayenu!”

denied him three times –

Jesus’ disciple Peter had bragged just the day before that he would defend Jesus to the death, but Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. Jesus knew that Peter’s egocentricity would lead him to save his own skin in the final hours.

Matthew 26:73 – 75: “After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do

not know the man.' And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."

the evil inclination of our hearts –

In Jewish ethical thought, the **yetzer hara**, (Hebrew for "the evil inclination," or "evil purpose in the heart") refers to the human tendency to put self first, do evil and violate the will of God. The term is drawn from the phrase "the imagination of the heart of man [is] evil" (Hebrew: יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם רָע, *yetzer lev-ha-adam ra*), in both Genesis 6:5 and 8:21. The **yetzer hatov**, the heart's good inclination, counters the evil, if people develop it.

emperors and bishops to try to control ... a monk to leave his monastery and risk his life –

During the Second Crusade, a **French monk Radulph** left his monastery without permission to preach in Germany that Jews were enemies of God and should be persecuted.

"Many Jews fell before the aroused mobs which rushed upon them crying, 'Hep, Hep.' Neither Emperor Conrad nor the bishops could stop them.... St. Bernard, at the risk of his life, went to confront Radulph and prevailed upon him to return to his monastery."

restrained the king from issuing his decree —

Flannery tells the story of King Ferdinand's **last-minute hesitation** about expelling the Jews of Spain:

"On January 4, 1492, while still in Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella issued the fatal decree. All Jews must leave the realm by June 30 under the penalty of death, since in the words of the decree, 'Jews seduce the new Christians, and the expulsion is the 'the only efficacious means of putting an end to these evils.' Stunned by the edit, powerful Jews, led by Abraham Senior, chief Rabbi and tax collector, offered an enormous sum of money to the king, who was known for his avariciousness. The story is told that at the critical moment, as Ferdinand reconsidered his decision, Torquemada rushed onto the scene, holding a crucifix aloft, and cried: "Judas Iscariot sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver; will Your Highness sell him for 300,000 ducats? Here He is, take Him and sell Him" upon which the king held fast to his decree. Many, including Senior himself, were converted, but the majority, brokenhearted, left within the appointed time."

a young social worker risk her life to save 2,500 children –

Irena Sendler was a Polish Catholic social worker who served in the Polish Underground and the Żegota resistance organization in German-occupied Warsaw during World War II. Assisted by other Żegota members, Sendler saved 2,500 Jewish children by smuggling them out of the Warsaw Ghetto, providing them with false documents, and sheltering them in individual and group children's homes operated by nuns and the religious Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary order.

In 1943, **Sendler was arrested** by the Gestapo, severely tortured, saved from execution by bribes and left unconscious in the woods with broken arms and legs. She recovered and lived through persecution from the Polish Communist government. Her heroism **was discovered** late in her life, and she died at the age of ninety-seven in Warsaw in 2008.

turn the other cheek —

One of Jesus' most famous sayings after the Beatitudes in what is called the "spiritual Torah" of Christianity in Matthew 5-7:

Matthew 5:38-41: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

claimed the right to slap us —

Flannery **describes** "this atrocious custom":

"A custom grew up in these years (around 1000 CE) whereby on each Good Friday, in retribution for the crucifixion of Jesus, a Jew received a blow in the face. The custom lasted for 300 years.... Probably in this era also began the practice of making special mallets for a Holy Week ritual to symbolize the killing of Jews. Traces of this practice seem to have come down to the present."

mighty hand and outstretched arm —

Deuteronomy 5:15: "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

the sight of the apple appealed to the eyes of Eve —

Genesis 3:1-7: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons."

enough to feed thousands of people —

Matthew 14:14-21: “As he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’ Jesus said, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘We have only five loaves here and two fish.’ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass; and taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

His blood be on us and on our children —

This quotation comes from the mob’s call for Jesus’s death in Jerusalem and has echoed on the lips of anti-Semites for centuries:

Matthew 27:22-26: “Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’ They all said, ‘Let him be crucified.’ And he said, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let him be crucified.’ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.”

the blood of reconciliation, not vengeance —

In *Jesus of Nazareth – Part II*, his most recent book on Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI has **affirmed and expanded** on the message of *Nostra Aetate*:

“The Christian will remember that Jesus’ blood speaks a different language from the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:24): it does not cry out for vengeance and punishment; it brings reconciliation. It is not poured out *against* anyone; it is poured out *for* the many, for all.... Read in the light of faith, it means that we all stand in need of the purifying power of love which is his blood. These words are not a curse, but rather redemption, salvation.” A **reviewer** for the *National Catholic Reporter* remarked on Benedict’s explicit re-interpretation: “Benedict argues, in **excerpts of his forthcoming book**, *Jesus of Nazareth — Part II*, not only that the charge of deicide was always misplaced, but that such misplacement cast centuries of Christians in the role the centurions played at the Crucifixion, seeking a scapegoat to avoid looking to their own guilt.”

carved the crossbars of that hated instrument of death on our foreheads –

Yiddish novelist Lamed Shapiro **captures the grotesque cruelty** of the pogroms in his stories compiled in *Pogrom Tales* that was published in 1909. The story tells how anti-Semites burst into a family's house, raped and murdered the mother and carved a cross on her son's forehead:

“Enough. Let her kick the bucket little by little right before his eyes. And I'm gonna cross him up, to save his kike soul from hell. I felt two deep cuts on my forehead, one across the other, and heard laughter again. A small warm stream ran down my forehead, over my mouth and nose, and into my mouth. I lost consciousness for a second time.”

This is a particularly heinous torture because the observant Jew prays with a miniature Torah scroll in a black box laced onto his forehead between his eyes as the fulfillment of the command from Deut. 11:18: “You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

a small still voice –

1 Kings 19:9-12: “And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He said, ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’ And he said, ‘Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

the presence of my spiritual and physical ancestors —

In the 1990s, Rabbi A. James Rudin was invited to speak at a Good Friday service. Here are some excerpts of his remarks:

“This is a unique moment, a historic moment, a moment to remember. For one of the first times in history, perhaps the first time, a rabbi has been asked to speak during a Good Friday service....” For Christians, Good Friday in its compelling power forms a mystical bridge between earth and heaven, between life and death, between past and future ... but there is another far different side to Good Friday ... if I omitted this other side of Good Friday, I would be unfaithful to my calling as a rabbi, as a Jewish teacher. I tell this other story of Good Friday because I have learned from many Christians that Good Friday is a day to face truth as on no other day of the year....

“Today, I feel the thirty-five centuries, the 3,500 years of Jewish history, present in this sanctuary. I acutely feel the presence of my spiritual and physical ancestors at this moment. Their faces are pressed

against the windows of this church. Their voices of earnest prayer resonate within me. Their songs of longing for God echo in my head. I am comforted by this link with those Jews who have lived before me. They are with me today as I with them.

“Their presence within my heart and head demand that I speak now of other Good Fridays, in other times and in other places. For this day, these very hours, was a time of terrible dread for many Jews, for my own grandparents who left their ancient homes in eastern Europe to escape persecution and who came as youngsters to this land, to Pennsylvania, a place founded by William Penn, a peaceful nonviolent man, a Quaker.

“Their poignant painful personal stories of past Good Fridays are permanent parts of my own memory bank, stories that have a tragic predictability. As a child, my grandparents told me how Christians in their native villages would each year rush from their churches at the conclusion of Good Friday services in countless towns, cities and villages in Europe ... rushing as an angry mob intent to do harm, to rape and to murder their Jewish neighbors. Somehow Good Friday provided an annual religious mandate for open hunting season on Jews.

‘Christ killers!’ they called out. ‘Yids! Kikes! You have killed our Lord and you must die!’ these mobs would shout in a variety of languages, but whatever language the murderous Good Friday mobs used, their intent was always lethal.”

(Excerpts from “A Rabbi Speaks at Good Friday Services.” Reprinted in *Journal for Preachers*, Lent 1995. Delivered by Rabbi A. James Rudin, interreligious advisor for the American Jewish Committee.)

When you did have such power, how did you behave? –

During the first centuries of the bitter Christian-Jewish division, violence became brutal and frequent on both sides. Major outbreaks of anti-Christian violence from Jews came during the Bar Kochba revolt in Palestine between 132-35 CE, in Alexandria around 400 CE and later around 600 CE during the Persian invasion of Jerusalem. According to Edward Flannery’s *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*:

“Sufficient incidents of Jewish violence against Christians are recorded to show that Jewish hatred was widespread, and while sporadic, often intense.... During his revolt (132-35) **Bar Kochba massacred Christians** who refused to deny Christ.... In Smyrna a century later, St. Pionius, burned under [Roman Emperor] Decius, addressed the Jews who derided him before his death: ‘I say this to you Jews ... that if we are enemies, we are also human beings. Have any of you been injured by us? Have we caused you to be tortured? When have we unjustly persecuted? When have we harmed in speech? When have we cruelly dragged to torture?’

“Exasperated by the new disabilities (under Roman emperor Justinian) Jews and Samaritans (the latter being more severely treated) made common cause, **massacred Christians** at Caesarea in 556 and destroyed their churches, but were, in turn, cruelly punished by Justinian’s legate. A half century later under (Roman emperor) Phocas (602-10), the Jews of Antioch killed many Christians, burned their bodies and dragged the Patriarch Anastatius (died 598) through the streets before killing him. Some observers exonerate the Jews of the murder of the Patriarch, but all concede their active participation.

“More serious was Jewish complicity in the Persian invasions of Koshru II (590- 628)... Smarting under the oppressions of Justinian’s Code and hoping to retain control of the Holy City, Jews organized in Palestine under Benjamin of Tiberias to join the Persian invader. They helped him lay waste to Christian homes and churches and assisted at the fall of Jerusalem (614). Thirty thousand Christians are said to have perished.”

Mon semblable –

“Our sins are obstinate; our repentance is faint.
 We exact a high price for our confessions,
 And we gaily return to the miry path,
 Believing base tears wash away all our stains.
 On the pillow of evil, Satan Trismegist,
 Incessantly lulls our enchanted minds,
 And the noble metal of our will
 Is wholly vaporized by this wise alchemist.
 ... You know him reader, that refined monster –
 Hypocrite reader, — my double (mon semblable) — my brother!”

(Charles Baudelaire, excerpts from “To the reader” in *The Flowers of Evil*.)

There is no simple explanation for the horror –

These are among the most familiar passages of the well-known *Pirke Avot*, an ethical mishnah in the Talmud:

“R. Yanni said, ‘It is not in our power to explain either the prosperity of the wicked or the afflictions of the righteous’ ” (Avot, 4.19).

Do not lose faith in Divine retribution –

“Nittai the Arbelite said, keep thee far from a bad neighbor; associate not with the wicked and abandon not the belief in retribution.” Rabbi Joseph Hertz commented: “The doctrine of divine retribution follows inevitably from the attribute of divine justice” (Avot, 1.7).day

this world is only a corridor into the world to come —

“R. Jacob said, ‘This world is like an ante-chamber to the world to come; prepare thyself in the ante-chamber that thou mayest enter into the hall’ ” (Avot, 4.21).

Yemach shemo vezichro –

These are the Hebrew words in the acronym Yeshu, the name used to refer to Jesus and other Jewish heretics. It means:“May his name be obliterated and forgotten”

If I am right, the streams in the fields –

A story from the **Babylonian Talmud** (*Bava Metzia* 59a-59b):

It was taught there: “If you cut it [an earthenware oven] into sections and place sand between the sections, Rabbi Eliezer says it is pure, and the sages say it is impure. And this is the oven of Akhinai.” What is “Akhinai”? R. Yehuda said in the name of Shemuel: “They surrounded him with words like an *akhna* (a snake) and made it impure.” It was taught: “On that day, R. Eliezer responded to them with all the arguments in the world and they did not accept them from him.”

He said to them: “If I am right, this carob tree will prove it.” The carob tree was uprooted from its place and moved one hundred cubits; some say, four hundred cubits.

They said to him: “We do not bring proofs from carob trees.”

He said to them: “If I am right, this stream of water will prove it.” The stream started to flow backwards.

They said to him: “We do not bring proof from streams.”

He said to them: “If I am right, the walls of the study hall will prove it.” The walls of the study hall inclined to fall.

R. Yehoshua rebuked them [the walls]. He said to them: “If Talmudic scholars contest one another in matters of Halakha, why does this concern you?” They did not fall, out of respect for R. Yehoshua, but they did not straighten, out of respect for R. Eliezer, and they are still inclined there.

He said to them: “If the halakha is as I say, let it be proved from the heavens.” A heavenly voice came forth and proclaimed: “Why are you contesting R. Eliezer, when Halakha follows him in every area?”

R. Yehoshua arose and said: “‘It is not in heaven’ (*Devarim* 30: 12). What does this mean?” R. Yirmiyah said: “The Torah has already been given at Sinai. We pay no heed to heavenly voices, since it has already been written in the Torah at Sinai, ‘follow the majority’” (*Shemot* 23: 2).

R. Natan came upon Eliyahu. He said to him: “What is the Holy One, Blessed be He, doing at this time?”

Eliyahu said to him: “He is laughing and saying, ‘My children have defeated me; My children have defeated me.’”

turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh —

Ezekiel 36:26-27: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”

every sound tree bears good fruit ... Such trees will be cut down –

Jesus tells his disciples to look beyond appearances and know people by their actions, not by their words. Matthew 7:16-20: You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Many will cry out his name, saying, “He is Lord! He is Lord!” ... “depart from me, you evildoers.”

Jesus predicts he will have many false followers who will disguise their evil deeds in superficial Christian appearance.

Matthew 7:21-24: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’”

I was naked and you did not clothe me ...

Matthew 25:31-46: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.”

James 1:22-24: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.”

“If you love me, keep my commandments!”

John 14:15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:21: “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

“Sh’ma Yis’ra’eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad ...V’ahav’tah eit Adonai Eloheha b’khol l’vav’khah uv’khol naf’sh’khah uv’khol m’odekhah.”

These are the first two lines of Shema, the most sacred Jewish prayer, from Deut. 6:4-5: “Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

It is exactly as he has said — and also to love your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12:28-34: “And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;’³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.’ And the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’”

So it is for us also.

Leviticus 19:18: “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” Rabbi Joseph Hertz offered a comment on this Leviticus passage: “The world at large is unaware of the fact that the sublime maxim of morality, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Lev. 19: 18)’ was first taught by Judaism.... And the command of Leviticus 19:18 applies to classes and nations as well as to individuals. Of Rabbinic opinion in all times, the following saying of Judah the Prince is typical: ‘On the Judgment Day, the Holy One, blessed be He, will call the nations to account for every violation of the command ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ of which they have been in guilty in their dealings with one another.’ ... One need not be a Hebrew scholar to be convinced oneself of the fact that *rea* (Hebrew for neighbor) means neighbor of whatever race of creed.”

Stay with us —

At the end of their journey on the road to Emmaus, Jesus prepared to leave the two disciples:

Luke 24:28-32: “He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?’”

an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing —

I am moved by fancies that are curled

Around these images, and cling:

The notion of some infinitely gentle

Infinitely suffering thing.

(T. S. Eliot, the *Preludes*)

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