

## **Passion/Palm Sunday**

Cycle C, 4.14.19

Isaiah 50:4-7/Philippians 2:6-11/

Luke 22:14-23:56

### **PARADISE NOW**

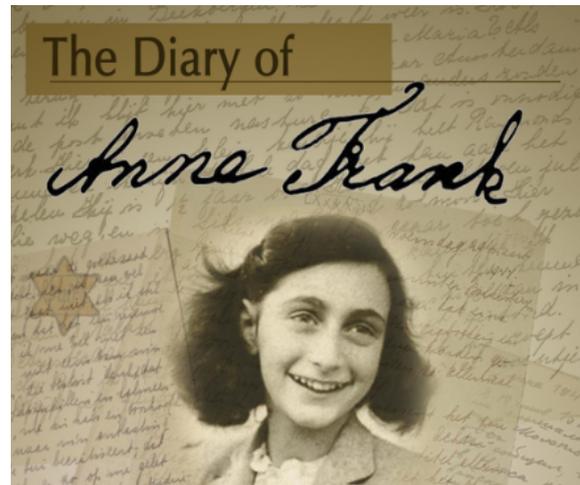
It is a scene found only in Luke's gospel. As Jesus hangs on the cross he is taunted by the bystanders. Even one of the criminals crucified with him joins in the jeering. But the other criminal will have none of it. Luke doesn't explain how or why, but something opens up within the heart of the criminal we've come to call the "good thief." Despite his own impending death, he realizes the injustice of Jesus' execution and senses God both with and within this rabbi hanging next to him. He rebukes the other criminal, admitting that both he and the other criminal are guilty but that Jesus is innocent. And then, in a plea that resounds through the centuries, he turns to Jesus and begs, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."



The dying Jesus responds out of compassion and mercy. "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Enduring excruciating pain and facing immanent death, Jesus holds to a greater certainty: *Paradise is real*. The kingdom of God he preached, a kingdom built on love, justice and reconciliation, has come. His place in the house of God is secure. Paradise is his destiny, his source and his home... and ours as well. In our confused and beleaguered world, torn by its own passions, that kingdom certainly seems a long way off. A

Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation which we have heard throughout Lent begs of God "a new world where the fullness of your peace will be revealed, where people of every race, language and way of life will be gathered to share the one eternal banquet with Christ." This is an image and a dream that can be difficult to hold onto. The distractions of our lives and the wayward direction of our world blurs the vision, making us lose sight of it.

In one of her diary entries, 15 year-old Anne Frank, who was born in Amsterdam in 1932 and died of typhus in a concentration camp in 1945, wrestled with this same question: "Is peace an impossible dream?"



In the youngster's journal which became the basis of several plays and films and is currently on stage at the Leshner Center – The Diary of Anne Frank -- she wrote:

*It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching*

*thunder, which will destroy us, too. I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet, if I look up to the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.*

I pray that you and I will never abandon the ideals of Jesus and his gospel, the ideal of loving our enemies and forgiving them; the ideal of a world where there is enough food and water to share with starving children; the ideal of a world free from fear of weapons, guns and violence so that children everywhere can go to school in safety; the ideal of acknowledging the dignity and equality of every human person, regardless of race, religion, gender or status; The ideal of building bridges to connect, not walls that divide; the ideal of believing that the quality of our soul is more important than the quantity of our possessions. Those ideals are not absurd or impractical. In fact, they're the only true path to the Kingdom of God.

During this week that we call "holy," the Church invites us to renew our faith and trust in God once more. On Holy Thursday we re-learn the model of humble service as Jesus washes his disciples' feet and shares his very life in the Eucharist. On Good Friday the pains and struggles of our lives find new meaning in the cross of Christ. At the Easter Vigil darkness gives way to the Easter fire, brightening our lives and enriching the Church with new members. On Easter the tomb that was empty is now full with the promise of new life.

Through it all Paradise is not a far-off dream  
but becomes a way of life  
when we allow the love of God  
to embrace us  
and when we turn to the face of Jesus  
with the same plea on our lips:  
*Remember me, Lord,  
when you come into your kingdom.*



*John Kasper, OSFS*

