

Homily
Palm Sunday
Kenosis Spirituality
April 14, 2019
Pastor Alice Iaquina

It's really hard to look regal on a donkey. They are short legged and wide in the belly, making the legs of anyone riding on them stick out awkwardly as they bounce down a dirt road. I've seen people in central and south America on such animals carrying wood bundles or produce to market. A King would ride in a chariot, or be carried on a throne of some kind, or ride a prized horse with gorgeous trappings and surrounded by guards.

That sure wasn't Jesus as he chose the donkey to be his transportation to Jerusalem. It was the antithesis of what was being proclaimed by the crowd. Jesus didn't claim Kingship. He lived only servanthood.

That is why I think Palm Sunday, could better be called Paradox Sunday, because although he was acclaimed as a King during his arrival in Jerusalem, he looked like a peasant, and he ultimately died, like a criminal, crucified.

Jesus emptied himself of all the glorification heaped on him by that palm-waving crowd as he rode into Jerusalem on an ass on when he replied to Pilate, "You say that I am a King." Jesus didn't claim that he was. He emptied himself of all such pretensions, regardless of the expectations others had for him.

Jesus died as he lived, *consistently and congruently, as a man with a mission to live in service to others, giving God the glory.* Jesus practiced such deep humility that he achieved a kenosis spirituality. His was the ultimate example of a kenosis spirituality - self-emptying for the sake of others: the poor, the broken, the humiliated, the marginalized, the abused.

(Kenosis is one of those seminary words that boggle the mind of most Christians and, in fact are rarely part of their conversations or thinking, words like, mytagogia, perichoresis, kyros moments, metanoia, pleroma and kenosis.)

We just heard The Passion of Jesus, which asks three central questions of us today:

1. "What must **we, as individuals**, do to achieve kenosis spirituality, to empty ourselves for the sake of others?
"What must **we, the People of God, as the Church**, do to to achieve kenosis spirituality, to empty the Church for the sake of others?
"What must the **hierarchical part of the Church as an institution** do to achieve kenosis spirituality, to empty itself for the sake of others?
2. Are we willing to bear the cost?" As an individual? As the people of God? As the institution?
3. Exactly what is that cost?

Think of those who have paid the cost for their kenosis spirituality, the full measure of self-emptying on behalf of others. *They are well-known because they frequently end up dead:* Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edith Stein, Oscar Romero, Sisters Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, Maura Clark and Dorothy Kazel, Carla Piette from Appleton, WI, known throughout Chile and El Salvador for her work for the poor in South America.

Homily
Palm Sunday
Kenosis Spirituality
April 14, 2019
Pastor Alice Iaquina

Think of all those who have been censured for their self-emptying work on behalf of others: Roy Bourgeois, Bill Brennan, Elisabeth Johnson, Jeanne Grammick, Hans Kung, Jon Sobrino, the LCWR and so many others who advocate an inclusive priesthood and church.

Think especially of the countless women who encountered oppression, rejection even persecution and death for their willingness to empty themselves for others; Women who have been theologians, abbesses, monarchs, missionaries, mystics, martyrs, nurses, teachers and women religious; Women who founded convents and abbeys, established and operated schools, hospitals, nursing homes and monastic settlements to serve others' needs.

And think of Pope Francis, now in the sixth year of his pontificate. On the April Palm Sunday of 2013, I preached about Francis, who had just been elected pope in March, less than a month before. This week I looked back at those homily prep notes in my file and found that I said, *"Think especially of our new spiritual shepherd, in his old black shoes, who now will daily tread the theological and ecclesial minefield of the red-slippered Papacy. I talked about Francis, who from the first moments in his new role, had begun to eschew the Vatican and media pressure to be 'The Pope,' in order to be a shepherd, a servant and a pastor of souls. Yes, certainly, he is the bishop of Rome, first among equals, but not as King of the bishops or the religious Emperor of the Catholic world."* The hierarchy and the faithful might as well have been waving palms to proclaim his Papacy in 2013, but Francis chose to ride the donkey into the office.

As Francis, Jorge Bergoglio was called to take a position that was counter intuitive to everything he had believed in and lived as a Jesuit all his life.

How does one empty oneself, when one's way of life was already in solidarity with the poor?

How does one achieve the humility that leads to kenosis spirituality?

When I preached Palm Sunday 2013, I posed the dilemma that because he would have to live in a palace, surrounded by opulence and untold wealth, Francis would have to empty himself even of his desire to live a life of simplicity and poverty. I prophesied, "What a supreme paradox of self-emptying his papacy might be."

Indeed! He proved me wrong. He rejected the palace for the cafeteria line and the hostel. In his papacy he has, like Jesus, eschewed the trappings and privilege of the status thrust upon him by others. His pontificate was reframed from the beginning with so many simple, subtle, but incredibly revolutionary actions.

No ermine cape, no red shoes, no throne up on a platform;

No jeweled miter or garments;

A bow to the people before they could bow to him;

Asking the favor of a blessing from the people before he offered a blessing;

Conversations on the same level with others;

Standing toe to toe, nose to nose;

Bear hugs and beaming smiles;

Homily
Palm Sunday
Kenosis Spirituality
April 14, 2019
Pastor Alice Iaquinta

*Double hand clasps, and shoulder squeezes;
Eye contact and attentive listening;*

*A ride in the mini-bus back to his hotel with the other cardinals to collect his belongings instead of limo or the popemobile, to pay his own bill and thank those who provided service to him;
A prayer jaunt out of the palace to give thanks to Mary;
A pastoral visit to an ailing cardinal in the hospital.*

All these actions occurred within hours of being elected pope.

No victory waves and gestures of triumphalism, no beaming smiles at crowds. Rather, a look of wonder and awe and perhaps even shock.

The smiles come with the one-on-one exchanges. The humor erupts. The cordiality blossoms. The inclusivity explodes.

Invitations extended to talk to religious leaders of all faith traditions and of all stripes of Christianity.

Warmly embracing his country's national leader, despite past struggles.

Helping the Patriarch of Constantinople on with his coat.

Greeting his guests at the door himself, going to their hotels to meet with them.

On that Palm Sunday in 2013, I wondered aloud whether or not this pattern of humility would continue. I offer now one example of Francis' kenosis spirituality true to the Passion message of the Gospel, that of foot washing on Holy Thursday.

Since Francis' installation as pope, rather than washing the feet of 12 priests in lace dresses at St. Peter's, on Holy Thursday, Pope Francis has chosen to celebrate the Holy Thursday Mass with people who could not come to the Vatican or the Basilica of St. John Lateran for the celebrations. He brought Christ to them. He met them where they were.

- 2013 Pope Francis has not only washed but kissed the feet of youthful offenders imprisoned in a detention center.
- 2014 He washed and kissed the feet of the elderly and severely disabled lay people in a rehabilitation center — men and women, non christians and non-believers, as well as Catholics. The participants in the foot-washing ranged in age from 16 to 86, and several were in wheelchairs with their feet swollen or disfigured. Thus a year into his servant pope position, he broke with the 1700 year old tradition of excluding women from the foot washing. That caused a huge reaction in the conservative Church, which has been a cost.
- 2015 He washed and kissed the feet of inmates, men and women who were in a small prison, who had all testified for the Italian government. Think witness protection. They were from Nigeria, Congo, Ecuador, Brazil, and Italy, and even included one toddler.
- 2016 He washed and kissed the feet of refugees, eight men and four women, including 3 Muslims, 1 Hindu, and 3 Coptic Christian women from Eritrea.
- 2017 He washed and kissed the feet of prisoners including three women.

Homily
Palm Sunday
Kenosis Spirituality
April 14, 2019
Pastor Alice Iaquina

- 2018 He washed and kissed the feet of prisoners: four from Italy; two from the Philippines; two from Morocco; and one each from Moldova, Colombia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Eight were Catholic; two were Muslim; one was Orthodox; and one was Buddhist.
- 2019 This week he will wash and, I presume, continue to kiss the feet of prisoners at the Velletri Correctional Facility 36 miles outside of Rome.

While I believe Francis still has to evolve in his understanding of women's call to priesthood, I do believe that the self-emptying this man lives is an example for all of us.

Francis hoped for "a poor church for the poor" from the start of his shepherding the Church. Calling all the presidents of all the Bishop's conferences to a world wide synod in February this year, it is clear that he is striving to empty the hierarchy of its silence, indifference, its inaction, its malfeasance toward those it has personally abused, children and women, and all the faithful whose trust has been betrayed, (even if Benedict, despite retirement, has attempted to thwart that effort with the release in the press of his 6000 word letter this week blaming the sex abuse on the moral collapse of the 1960's through the 1980's.) Humility, as we know, is not the hierarchy's strong suit. It doesn't come easily and therefore the institutional Church of the hierarchy lacks kenosis spirituality.

Today Francis has emptied himself of red-slippered regality to make room for the movement of the Spirit. He pays homage to everyone; he rejects privilege for himself. It is clear that he is teaching the world and the Church that the papacy is a status he occupies, not an idolatrous, infallible divination of the Christian he is.

Even today, he preached about the need for the Church to end its triumphalism, to be a self-emptying institution.* This week he kissed the feet of two rival Sudanese leaders asking them to maintain the peace in the Sudan.** (Francis and I did not confer about our homily themes, but I am delighted that he and I are on the same page about what the true implications of the passion are for the Church!)

In 2013 I predicted that Francis might be surprised by what is ahead. I was right.

The cost to live Jesus has been frustration and opposition for him at every turn by the hierarchy, which self-centeredly strives to protect its power and self-interest.

For God to call Francis to stand in the richest center of any church that exists, to be elevated when such elevation contradicts his whole Jesuit life, is a different kind of self-emptying, a kenosis that is nearly unfathomable to us.

It has been a paradox of self-emptying of the role of Pope, to achieve consistency and congruence between Francis' own spirituality and his theology, as shepherd and servant. John Allen said in an 2013 NCR article,***

"There's the institutional church, with its rules and dogma, its wealth and power, its hierarchical chain of command. Then there's the church of the spirit, a humble and simple community of equals with a special love for the least of this world. Ideally, the two go together, but in any case, they're distinct. By taking the name "Francis," the pope effectively said the spirit of that second face of the church needs to shine through anew

Homily
Palm Sunday
Kenosis Spirituality
April 14, 2019
Pastor Alice Iaquina

in the first.” Allen continued, Henri De Lubac once wrote: ‘the difference between St. Francis and Martin Luther is the difference between a reform aimed at holiness and a

reform aimed at criticism.’ In choosing Bergoglio, the cardinals seem to have opted for the former.”

As a pilgrim church on the way to Holiness, we, the People of God, each need to reconcile any paradox between our theology and spirituality.

Hopefully, we will watch Pope Francis continue to peel away layers of pomp that have everything to do with ceremony but nothing to do with kenosis spirituality or servant priesthood as a shepherd.

Jesus set his face in determination toward Jerusalem, toward self-emptying. Francis’ face has consistently been turned toward the humble poor, healing, toward inclusivity not toward not the ecclesial posh. Are our faces set like flint toward self-emptying, toward a kenosis spirituality?

Francis picked up the cross of the papacy by shedding its symbols, in order to carry the true cross, the cross of ending any paradox between the Church’s spirituality and theology. That has required a kenosis spirituality, self-emptying for the laity, the clergy, the hierarchy, for the whole Church. That has been a very heavy cross.

The ways we empty ourselves for the sake of others are likely not so paradoxical or dramatic as Francis’. Nonetheless they may well challenge us. But our Spirituality and theology can not be a paradox; they must be consistent and congruent for the pope, for us, for the whole Church.

Is our own theology consistent and congruent with a kenosis spirituality?

Or is kenosis spirituality a paradox for us, as it is for the hierarchy?

WHEN we live our kenosis spirituality in dedicated service to others in need,
stepping out of our comfort levels,
abandoning our self-interest and self-centeredness,
confronting the social structures of sin,
(not just the symptoms of those structures that cause the needs in the first place),
taking economic and political actions,
and engaging in social outreach,

THEN our theology and spirituality are consistent and congruent!

No Paradox exists in us when we live Jesus!

Living Jesus requires a consistent theology congruent with a lived kenosis spirituality that reflects our humility, mercy, compassion, inclusivity, justice, peace and love.

In the last six years, we have seen our newest pope redefine the function of the papacy. He will, hopefully, continue to empty himself in the role, and of the role, just as Jesus emptied himself of the role of King.

Homily
Palm Sunday
Kenosis Spirituality
April 14, 2019
Pastor Alice laquinta

We pray that Francis will continue to refocus the Church on the mission and vision of Jesus' own kenosis, his self-emptying humility, rather perpetuate the hierarchal, self-referential, medieval court-like, life of the Vatican.

We pray that we as individuals and as the People of God, like Frances, will grow in humility so we too are able to pick up that cross of kenosis spirituality to end the paradox between Catholicism's theology and its spirituality.

*Text of Pope Francis' 2019 Palm Sunday homily

<https://zenit.org/articles/pope-francis-homily-for-palm-sunday-full-text/>

**Pope Francis kisses the feet of rival Sudanese leaders this week.

John Allen, NCR, *The real winner of the 2013 conclave: St. Francis of Assisi*, Mar 15, 2013

*** <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/real-winner-2013-conclave-st-francis-assisi>