Columns
Spirituality



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May 2, 2024

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It is the eve of Palm Sunday, and I will not be going to church for this celebratory, triumphant remembrance. For eight weeks, I have seen four medical people, taken their heavy prescriptions of antibiotics, and still the nasal infection lingers. The pain is mostly gone, but nose drips continue.

I finish my morning prayers, begging for Divine help.

Then I pile on winter clothes, two hats and wrap a scarf round and round my face, until only my eyes show. Slipping into boots, I venture outside with shovel in hand to face 1 foot of snow burying everything in sight, including our cars. My companion and I need prescription renewals.

Twenty minutes later I come inside for a breather on a couch facing our front window. Suddenly there appears a lone figure in the middle of our street. Over his shoulder he carries a shovel! That's all I need. I throw on my winter clothes, two hats, mask, and race outside to flag the walker in.

I offer him the job of shoveling us out — long driveway, front to back, two snow covered cars and sidewalks.

It is Palm Sunday eve, and here comes a strange-looking Christ figure with a shovel walking past our house!

And so it happens. I help shovel from our front door, down the snowy steps to the driveway where the stranger sweeps and shovels the complete length of the driveway, two cars and all the sidewalks. I help where I can, go back in, and when he finishes, I return with $40 in my hand.

It is then I see he has almost no teeth in front, which doesn't stop him from smiling when I hand him the money. When he sees the amount, he protests—it's too much. For no good reason I can think of, I tell him I'm a nun.

Stunned, he says, "Wow!" He thinks it over a minute, says "Thank you," and gently kisses the top of my head.

Then the stranger walks up the hill, and I go back Into the house.

This I know — Holy Week came early this year. Not with palms, but with shovels.

Soon enough we put them both away. No more need. It is Friday called Good. Christ has died, and his Body lies in a borrowed tomb.

Saturday comes, a nothing day. Even the sky is befuddled. At a loss what to do with itself, the sky stretches gray, rolls and rolls of mesmerized gray, going nowhere. Tree limbs stretch motionless into the gray. The neighborhood sleeps.

Suddenly, two birds fly in sync past my window. And are gone. They know Christ is risen. I failed to see Him in a man with a shovel.

Easter comes with overwhelming lights, song, candles, ancient rituals and Scripture readings from endless ages. All is heard new this day. The Body of Christ becomes our Sacred Easter Bread.

Two days later, the sacred story continues. We stand with Mary Magdalene outside the tomb. She sees two angels inside and no Christ. Unimpressed with angels, she turns around and sees Christ, whom she mistakes for a gardener. She demands, "Where is He? Where have you laid Him?"

And He says her name. "Mary." It's all she needs. He may leave, but she never lets Him go, one way or another.

The nerve of the woman is passed on to each of us. Every day we ask the same question: "Where are You?" And we wait, until He says our name.

Let us every day together listen, until He calls our name.

Then light a new candle, put it in the front window of our homes and pray together these words of Gerard Manley Hopkins:

> Let him easter in us,
>
> be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
>
> be a crimson-cresseted east.