

Saint Francis De Sales

Easter Reflections 2024



I have always been interested in historical events and writings, chiefly about secular matters. Times of wars and times of peace, or, as the cynics might say, the absence of wars, have always captivated me from the time of my earliest memories. Affairs such as treaties, plagues, and disasters, either man made or naturally occurring, have caused my mind to explore different avenues that would probably be of little interest to most people. In my retirement years my interests have wandered more away from what has happened into the realms of what might have happened, a literary genre now known as Alternate History or Fiction.

As a change of pace, I recently read a book, “The Untold Story of the Darkest Days” by Eric Suddoth. It is a fictional account of the hours from the final moments of the crucifixion of Jesus to the very first moments of the realization of His Resurrection when He is seen by Mary Magdalene, a time period that is barely mentioned in the Gospel accounts. This scarcity of information allows the author more or less free rein in using his imagination to relate what might have occurred in the minds and hearts of the shattered and demoralized followers of Jesus.

It is difficult for me, and I suppose for most Christians, to read these spare Gospel accounts and get into the minds of the Apostles hiding in the Upper Room. They were terribly afraid that they might be next to suffer as did Jesus at the hands of the authorities, either Religious or Roman, and were in despair at losing their Teacher of the past three years, a man for whom they had left behind everything of their previous lives. They did not, as do we, have the inestimable advantage of knowing that Jesus would rise from the dead, thereby literally revitalizing their mission, enabling and encouraging them to spread the Good News into the far corners of the earth.

In addition to their fear and despair, they must have been further saddled by their guilt at deserting Jesus to the Sanhedrin’s search party or posse (sorry, I watched too many Westerns as a kid). At the Last Supper they had all fervently pledged undying, absolute loyalty to Jesus, and then, a mere few hours later they scattered, fleeing in panic for their lives. One of them, in his haste, even left behind his clothes. Peter must have felt the twin burdens of guilt of his desertion and that of his vigorous denial of Jesus. Judas, mentally shattered by remorse, is reported to have taken his own life in despair. Cynics, shielded by their anonymous personal inactivity and always ready with their barbed remarks directed against those who actually dare to exert themselves, have commented that the only time the entire Christian community acted in complete unison was at the Garden of Gethsemane when the disciples all ran away together.

The author relates his story in short chapters told in the first person by the various characters involved. We hear from Longinus – the soldier who tradition states used his spear to stab Jesus in His side, Mary His mother, Mary Magdalene, Peter, John, Pontius Pilate, and others. The disciples are portrayed as confused men, some wanting to return to their old lives in hiding and despair, others favored trying to continue to preach the teachings of Jesus by fleeing to safer parts of Judea and Galilee, or even leaving the country entirely. Thoughts of revenge

against the Roman who used the spear on Jesus were high on Peter's list. Mary Magdalene is portrayed as the most levelheaded one among them all, and emerges as the de facto leader of the group in the absence of Jesus.

Most of us who have lived into adulthood, and sadly some even before reaching such a status, have experienced life altering or shattering events which threaten to destroy us. Most of us muddle through such times as best we can with the help of family and friends. Others immerse themselves in work or social or religious causes as a means of coping with such overwhelming catastrophes or setbacks. Some resort to the false promises of relief by using alcohol or drugs. Many of us turn to Jesus for solace and comfort. The Apostles had to go through their 'Darkest Hours' in the total absence of Jesus, and with no assurance that He would ever again be available to help them in any way. They feared that His teachings would become merely a pleasant and fading memory of things unattainable forever due to His death. The claims Jesus made of rising on the third day were forgotten in the despair that gripped the Apostles during those hours.

Before we criticize them for such forgetfulness or apparent lack of faith, we should remember that in less than a week's time they had gone through the triumph of Palm Sunday when the crowd wanted to make Jesus their King, the thrill of the cleansing of the Temple (who doesn't want to see the big shots and petty thieves getting what's coming to them, even if only just for that one time), the solemn majesty of the Last Supper, and the final betrayal – the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus, a means of death fit for a criminal, not for a just man, as Pilate called Him. Despair and fear are very understandable human reactions to such tumultuous turns of events. In all honesty, can we claim that we would have done any better than the Apostles in the same circumstances? I doubt if I would have even done as well, let alone better.

Although the book fell a bit short of a Saul on the way to Damascus moment for me, it did provide some telling ideas for me about which to contemplate and meditate. Personally, it was a book that I found to be more rewarding than many of the more standard religious tomes that I privately label as 'piety in the skyety' compositions which may have been satisfying to me as a child but are unfulfilling as an adult. In any case the book is available on Amazon. It is free on Kindle Unlimited or about \$5 to buy the electronic version.



To all of us, may God grant a 'Happy Easter!'

Respectfully submitted,
Jerry Devine
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Easter 2024