

This day is a mixed kind of day, part of the “paradox” of the gospel story. Theological books call today both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. (*Palms* have to do with praise, while *Passion*, besides the very common use in romance, is from the Latin word meaning Suffering.) We join the crowds in Jerusalem in shouting, Hosanna, Blessed is He, Blessed is this Jesus, doing healings and great teachings! But we might also not trust his strange message that Love is the greatest power, that we must Forgive those who hurt us, that peacemaking with neighbors is possible!

This morning, I’m focusing more on the passion part, the suffering of our Lord and the suffering in the world, and specifically the meaning and value of Tears. One of my first solid affirmations of the value of tears was a song I heard by our friend Ken Medema (surprise, I’m not going to sing it this morning), a song entitled “If This Is Not A Place.” The music is beautiful, but the lyrics really grabbed me: “*If this is not a place where tears are understood, where can I go to cry?*”

Crying is often seen as a sign of weakness and we get *embarrassed*. Just the other night, I saw the touching movie at the Screening Room “My Penguin Friend.” I saw one person leaving quickly at the end of the movie, seeming to avoid eye contact, as there were tears running down her cheeks. Pets, whether dogs, cats, horses, or Penguins seem to evoke deep feelings in their owners, as does the loss of such friends, or the loss of any friend.

Embarrassment to show emotion seems to be everywhere. One of male actors in the movie, (spoiler alert here), at the funeral for the penguin, said rather stoically “My eyes *moistened with emotion!*” (The audience cracked up... why? because we identified with the truth that we, especially men, try to hide tears!) When I was in the rain forest giving vaccination

shots, fathers were heard telling their little boys “Hombre no llora!” (A man doesn’t cry!) Fr. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan and founder of the *Center for Action and Contemplation*, did a lot of ministry with men in his younger years, leading retreats for spiritual growth. In his own learnings on the subject, he met with Maasai warriors in Kenya who showed him their “caves of grief,” where, as part of their initiation journey, they had to *learn* to literally cry for all the world – plants, animals, fellow humans, earth itself – *before they could continue on to manhood*.

Richard Rohr tells of his retreats, of male initiation rites, how the third day was called “grief” day... and how difficult it was for many men to access underlying sadness in their lives.

Let me share a bit from Richard Rohr’s book “The Tears of Things:” *There is an inherent sadness and tragedy in almost all situations, in our relationships, our mistakes, our failures, and even our victories. We must develop a very real empathy for this reality, knowing that we cannot fully fix things, or make them to our liking. This “way of tears,” and the vulnerability that it expresses, is opposed to our normal ways of seeking control through willpower, force, retribution, and violence. Instead, we begin in a state of empathy with people and events.*

We remember that Jesus said in his sermon on the mount “Blessed are those who mourn.” I remember my great aunt asking me what is the shortest sentence in the Bible... “Jesus wept!” We remember that he wept over the death of his friend Lazarus, that he wept over the whole city of Jerusalem, that he wept again in the Garden of Gethsemane in the last week of his life. Jesus was called a “man of sorrows,” one “well acquainted with grief” as the prophet Isaiah said. His mother Mary was weeping at the foot of the cross, as were the other women when they went to the tomb.

People, often apologize for or try to hide their tears. But we all have sad times, tearful times; it is a universal thing! ... One of Ken's songs is called "Is There a Hidden Teardrop?" Anyone around the late Herbie Williamson would have noted the moistened eye, the not-so-hidden teardrops. Many of us identify with the "lump in the throat" and wonder if it is worth it to "hold back tears." Richard Rohr testifies to his own disposition to tears: *"Whenever I witness any scene of personal reconnection of lost family members, or even people reunited with their long-lost dogs, I sob. When I do, I usually feel ashamed and try to hide it. I do not think I personally have any deep loss or abandonment issues, but I sob like a baby nevertheless."*

We know that sadness is often what underlies anger, so that if the sadness is not reached in honest expression, people can have real problems managing their anger at life's problems and their own limitations. Many spiritual teachers attest to the truth that if pain is not processed and transformed, it is often transmitted to others. If anger is not managed, it can be projected onto others. Letting tears flow is surely one way to transform and heal anger. It allows the underlying sadness to be dealt with in full honesty. Rohr says, *"I surely believe some form of projection of our anger on others is at the heart of the nonstop world wars. It's at the center of cultures that encourage punitive or emotionally- withholding parenting. Crying, at its best, teaches us to hold the emotion instead of projecting it elsewhere."*

So "holding the emotion," feeling the sadness, letting some tears flow, is part of healing. If not, it can be projected outward, even turned into anger, or bullying, as is often the case with men who are still boys, who have not grown up. What do schoolboy bullies do? They scapegoat others to avoid their own

feelings of sadness or weakness. Often they make fun of the boy that they consider to be weaker, and call names, you know them: “sissy, wuss, crybaby,” and they even attack the weaker boy, throw his books to the ground, or trip him and throw *him* to the ground! The weakness is really in the bully, who can’t stand it in himself, projects it onto a scapegoat, then attacks in an attempt to destroy it. This never happens of course; the bully just moves on to the next victim.

It is indeed the paradox of the gospel that somehow love, suffering love, modeled by Jesus, is indeed a powerful force, a redemptive love, a healing love. Tears are normal, even necessary... to process pain and suffering, rather than projecting it upon others or letting anger build up inside. Richard Rohr reveals his own experience and wisdom as he ages: *“I can’t help but see the shadow side of everything now. On my better days I’m not angry about it; I’m just sad about it. And this sadness I can live with and love with. Things do not have to be perfect for me to reverence them, respect them, love them, and forgive them.”*

To underscore the healing aspect of tears, let me conclude with a little more of Ken’s lyrics... *If this is not a place where tears are understood, where can I go to cry? If this is not a place where my heart cries can be heard, where can I go to speak? I don’t need another place for always wearing smiles, even when it’s not the way I feel. If this is not a place where my spirit can take wing, where can I go to fly?*

In tears, there is a catharsis, a lifting of weight, letting it out; there is a healing, a resurrection. After a significant loss, it may take awhile. A shoulder to cry on, a support group, a place where sadness is OK and tears are understood. Tears work toward healing, strengthening, and being able **to fly**. Amen.