

A Little While

Holy Week used to be and may still be a busier week for those living in a monastery than it is for those of us at the parish level. It included not only the usual services from Palm Sunday to Easter but three evenings of a service called Tenebrae (meaning Darkness). This evening service required the chanting of 14 psalms plus a similar number of other biblical readings and antiphons.

After the chanting of each psalm an acolyte approached a candelabrum holding 15 lighted candles and extinguished one. By the end, 14 had been extinguished; only the top candle remained lit. This candle was then carried by the acolyte out of sight so that darkness prevailed in the chapel for a brief period, after which the one lit candle was brought out of hiding and replaced on the top socket of the candelabrum – symbolizing Christ's resurrection. Whew!

Relevant to that service, there is a passage in the Last Supper account of John's Gospel where Jesus says to his disciples: *A little while (micron) and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me.* The disciples asked him what this meant. Obviously we think it meant the short interval between the arrest and resurrection of Jesus. That would be the literal sense of it.

But biblical scholars down through the centuries have always seen a *deeper meaning* to biblical stories. And this "little while" (this micron) of which John writes could very well relate to your own life as a twenty-first century Christian.

For instance, I entered St. Cyril's Parochial School at age five. Thereafter it was parochial schools and, in my teens, a seminary and beyond until I was thirty – exposed to my Christian heritage every step along the way, in classrooms and churches. Yet all the while one or another of the 14 candles of my Christian initiation was dimmed by other influences, distractions. It only took "a little while" for my faith to grow routine. As Jesus said, we run the risk of a *little while and you will not see me*; you will not really know me; you will grow more secular or sentimental or pious than Christian. Worship will become more a habit than an event, a soul-stirring encounter with Christ.

Having been introduced to Christ in the past course of your life, have your candles gone out? Has your understanding of who Christ is and what his Gospel is all about fallen into some kind of shadowy state? Are you in that *micron*, that "little while" during which you do not fully grasp the deeper impact Scripture can have upon your mind and heart, the radical joy and freedom no shadow can obscure?

Christ says to you as he did to his disciples at the that Last Supper (or first Eucharist): *A little while (micron) and you will no longer see me, and again a little while* (it could be forty years but it will seem a little while) *and you will see me . . . You will begin to understand what you have been hearing our lectors read, what Genesis and Exodus and the prophets and John and Paul are saying, what we mean by the word sacrament – and, as Jesus continued to say, your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.*