



The Crown of Life

A Holy Week Reflection from Bishop McConnell

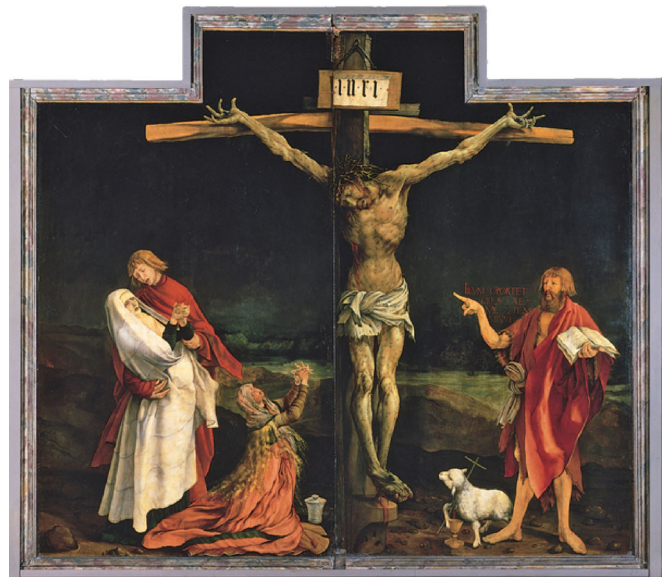
Coronam de spinis posuerunt super caput eius...
They put a crown of thorns upon his head...
(Matthew 27:29)

April 4, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

The coming weeks will be hard. As the pandemic moves relentlessly towards its peak, we are bracing for the worst. And yet we have no idea what “the worst” will be, when it will strike, how long it will last.

The coronavirus is aptly named; this crown of thorns now pressed down upon the heads of so many. What a mockery it makes of human dignity. Every morning we awaken to the scenes taking place in Italy, Spain, and that now threaten New York — people dying alone, bodies in storage.



It does not matter that such scenes are not yet happening here. They are happening to our human family, with whom we share in the Image of God, our flesh and blood, those whom God *has made little lower than the angels*, whose nature God *has crowned with glory and honor* (Psalm 8).

We have never needed Holy Week more.

The observances of the coming days will be our food for the coming weeks. We may observe them in our homes, or with others online, but we dare not miss a moment. They are the record of God’s declaration that the powers of death and hell have been undone, not by magic, but by love. God’s strategy is simple; to send his Son — God’s own soul and heart — into our darkness. We will tell the story slowly in the hope that every word will sink in; how the Lord Jesus prepares his friends for his death, feeds them with himself, washes their feet, commands them to love. We will hear him mocked, see the crown of thorns pressed down upon his head, watch him as he dies on the Cross, bearing our weakness. We will wait in silence as he descends to the dead. And when he returns, raised, immortal, carrying our flesh and nature with him, we will weep for joy.

And we will carry that joy with us into a fearful world. In every way we can, we will pray healing for the sick, comfort for the dying, courage and protection for the doctors and nurses, janitors and cleaners, first

responders and others on the front lines. As the world walks the way of the Cross in the coming weeks, Easter will unfold. We do not know how. We only know that the crown of thorns has been overtaken by the Crown of Life. The hope the world needs begins with us. So, do not grow weary or lose heart. Hold fast to one another. Help everyone you can. Let your song, your prayer, your love, be made known. *For the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10)* .

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dorsey McConnell', with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

(The Rt. Rev.) Dorsey McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh

Photo: Detail from the Isenheim Altarpiece (1512–1516) by German artists Nikolaus of Haguenau and Matthias Grünewald. Details about this magnificent piece are [here](#) and [here](#) .

