Lenten Reflections 2015

Back to Square One: A Journey of Love through the Signs of the Times

By Carlos Salinas

Holy Thursday
April 2, 2015
Dear friends in Christ,

The liturgical seasons are an opportunity to delve deeper into some aspect of our Faith and discover the presence of God and God’s love in our everyday lives. Each one is a journey through an invisible landscape that gives us waypoints to navigate our interaction with our family, our community, our world, and our God. They also allow us to illuminate more fully our liturgical celebration, our prayer, and our action.

Lent is the season when we go back to square one, giving life to the call for our continuing conversion, culminating in our baptismal renewal as we follow Christ on His journey through the narrow passage of suffering into eternal life. Yet our spiritual lives do not exist solely in the spiritual realm; they become manifest in our world through our actions. Our action is where the rubber meets the road. So in this navigation we look not only for the guidance from God through Scripture and Liturgy; we must also look at the Signs of the Times of the world to better listen and respond to God’s call to us.

These reflections are meant to accompany your reading of the Scripture that our Church has given to us for this journey. My suggestion is that you read the scriptures once upon waking so that they may percolate through you, before coming back to them at some point later in the day. Only then would I suggest that you look at the reflections and other accompanying material. And then go at it!

May you have a wonderful journey filled with Faith, Hope, and Love.

Carlos Salinas
Carlos Salinas works with the traditional authorities and other leaders of the Kofan indigenous people in southern Colombia’s Putumayo Department as the Executive Director of Healing Bridges and founder of the Corporación Visión Renacer in Bogotá. He first met them in 2001 and first visited the Kofan reservation Santa Rosa del Guamuéz in February 2004. Since then, he has been to Santa Rosa more than forty times.

Carlos is from Chile and lives with his family in Washington, D.C., where he belongs to Holy Trinity Catholic Church, a Jesuit parish where he is a Catechist, occasional Lector, and Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist.

Carlos began his social justice and peace work with the Central America Solidarity Alliance and the Progressive Student Union while an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania in 1984. Following graduation, he worked in Cali, Colombia for the Fundación Carvajal, during which time he made his first visit to Putumayo to stay with a traditional authority of the Siona people, the late Francisco Piaguaje.

Upon his return to the USA, Carlos joined Amnesty International USA Local Group 168 in Charleston, SC and when he moved to Washington, D.C. to pursue graduate studies at Georgetown University in 1990. He joined Amnesty International USA’s staff as a Ralph Bunche Fellow and Student Program Coordinator for the Mid Atlantic Region. He became Amnesty’s lobbyist for Latin America and the Caribbean in May 1991, a position he held until his last year on staff, 2000-2001, during which time Carlos became Amnesty’s Acting Director of Government Relations.

Carlos briefly worked with the Amazon Conservation Team before spinning-off to found the Shamans’ Videohistory Project in late 2003, which led to his current work advocating for the human rights of the Kofan people.

To learn more about Healing Bridges:

• Send an e-mail to: healingbridgesdc@gmail.com
• Visit the websote: www.shamanvideo.org
• Link to Healing Bridges dc facebook page: www.facebook.com/HealingBridgesDC
• Twitter: @ApuFen
With the beginning of the Mass of Holy Thursday, our Lenten preparation comes to a close and we enter the gates of the Triduum, a luminous palace where the flicker of candles reflect all around us, off its gilded walls. A great weight is lifted off our shoulders even though we know that we are just beginning three very intense days.

Setting this day apart from Lent, God tells Moses and Aaron that the people of Israel must now reconceptualize time. The calendar is to be set differently from before. It is to begin with a commemoration celebrating freedom and the people of Israel’s special relationship with God. A clear break, something is radically new. So too with this day.

We might recall that God called Moses to his ministry telling Moses that God had heard the cries of God’s people. What a cacophony must reach God these days! Social conflict and warfare plague every continent; needless, avoidable suffering peers at us from every corner of our land and globe. Small farmers near Xai Xai, Mozambique; the Gambella region in Ethiopia, or Koh Kong province in Cambodia watching their small farms sold off or bulldozed over in the name of development.

Foreign and/or local investors and government officials make life-changing decisions about peoples’ lives without any consideration for their preferences or their rights. Like the Belo Monte dam in Brazil threatening to destroy the lives of indigenous peoples. Colombian Jesuit Javier Giraldo wrote that the U’Wa indigenous people in Colombia have “the right to not be sold off.” In Nebraska, farmers and ranchers fight the invocation of eminent domain to take away their land for the KXL pipeline while the Rosebud Sioux Tribe protest that by crossing two of their reservations without their consent, it will violate the Fort Laramie Treaties. The San Carlos Apache struggle to prevent an international mining operation on sacred land in Arizona. The Kofan in Colombia face an onslaught of seismic tests and well drillings. Slavery shape-shifts over time.

We recall that Israel found itself in slavery in Egypt after their welcome had worn off, an ancient anti-immigrant story. But after working great signs and wonders, God instructs God’s people that the commemoration shall center around a meal where God’s people shall remember God and the price of freedom: life itself. A terrible toll will be inflicted.
From a historical perspective, the Passover ritual represents the melding of two very different life traditions: the semi-nomadic and the pastoral, as if Cain and Abel were reconciled in one ritual representing a new birth for the people of Israel. A re-incorporation of two traditions, a re-membering of the people from the dawn of time. This re-memberance is the setting for the Last Supper. Jesus has prayed for the re-memberance in the prayer He gave us and this re-memberance he has symbolically enacted by choosing twelve apostles, representing the twelve tribes. A re-memberance within a re-memberance, a prelude for the ultimate atonement for His people, like the Suffering Servant.

The psalm takes up the theme of the thanksgiving offering. In this prayer, we give thanks by remembering the Lord, the very same prescription presented by Paul, recalling the words of Jesus. We eat the bread and drink the wine to remember Him. As we eat and drink, our bodies are nourished, our bodies re-member. We become reintegrated as we become the Body of Christ, we re-member the People of God. We call it Communion.

How are we to manifest this? John the evangelist’s account of the Last Supper does not include Jesus sharing His body and blood. Instead, John shows us Jesus sharing His life, washing the disciples’ feet. Jesus tells all of us that this is the example we are to follow: service, moving away from self and towards others. We must wash each other’s feet.

We can find so many examples of washing feet wherever we may look. From the school teacher who goes the extra mile by volunteering to run the school musical to the parents who give their time to build the sets and make the costumes; the hospice worker that checks in on patients outside of office hours and beyond the regular schedule; to the front-line health workers working punishingly long and physically demanding shifts aiming to contain Ebola and comforting the afflicted; to the many people across parishes and schools working to address homelessness, poverty, living wage, the migrants in their communities, among many other concerns.

The most important example takes place among our families and friends. But we are called to go beyond the call of duty. To humble ourselves and to serve. Key being the humility. It’s not enough to “do God’s work” from the comfort of an office; there is a humbling of one’s self that is essential to ensure that it truly is for the Greater Glory of God. And surely, we cannot wash each other’s feet if we do not defend each other. For then, where will we find the feet to be washed?
Reflection Questions

• Does the Passover story hold out any clues for so many other situations of suffering peoples?

• Before Holy Thursday Mass: what ground have we covered? What have we learned? Have our prayer and our readings informed our daily lives so far? Did we come back to the Lord during this Lenten season?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
You celebrated the liberation of Your People
By teaching the liberation through service,
In humility and in love.

Inspire us to follow your example
Wherever that may lead us.
Show us the profound liberation that comes through service.

Show us how we re-member Your Body
As we remember You through our service.

That our Communion may build Community,
That our Community may build the Kingdom
And in so doing that we may do the Will of the Father. Amen.

Faith in Action

• Read over John’s account of the Last Supper a few times and place yourself in the scene that John describes. You might be someone serving the meal. You could be one of the apostles. You could be Peter. How does it play out in your imagination? You may find it useful to go back to the account a few times.

It might be helpful to picture it in your dining room or that of a loved one. Some place you can imagine well, some place where you have shared love, some place where you have served, some place that you love.