

WHEN THE ROAD GETS ROUGH

--As Lent draws near to its climactic conclusion at Easter, within the confines of the final week, we find our feelings stretched to a snapping point.

There's a veritable world of difference between what appears to be happening on Palm Sunday, with all the waving and cheering and exhilaration on that Jerusalem street, and what is impossible to deny is happening on Good Friday, with all the bleeding, suffering, and agonizing on the Cross.

Right there, someplace in the middle of these two emotional extremes is the Thursday of that fateful last week in Jesus' life--the night that, tonight, we remember.

It is there, on that day, that the festering conspiracy against Jesus will come to an ugly head, and expedient opportunity will present itself to see it through to a ghastly conclusion.

It is there, on that day, that Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests and agrees to betray Jesus to the authorities.

It is there, on that evening, as Jesus prays alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, that he comes and finds Peter, James, and John sleeping when they should be watching--not once, not twice, but three times.

It is there, on that evening, that Jesus pleads with God for the time of trial to be averted, and for some other Divine course of action to unfold. And "Abba" does nothing.

It is there, on that evening, that, as trusted disciples continue to doze, the act of betrayal is completed in that very Garden--facilitated, of all things, by a kiss--and Jesus is dragged away.

It is there, on that night, that all of his chosen followers and friends desert him, and run and hide. The shepherd will be struck, he has forewarned, and the sheep will all flee--and flee they do.

It is there, on that night, that Jesus will be taken before the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes, and compelled to endure all manner of false and foolish testimony alleged against him.

It is there, on that night, that he is mocked, and spit upon, and humiliated, and beaten.

And it is there, on that night, just before dawn, that Simon Peter, who--after Jesus' arrest, has followed behind him at a safe distance in order to see for himself what will happen--denies any relationship whatever with his teacher, again, not once, not twice, but three times.

What a rough night that is! And we have yet to get to the sham of a hearing before Pilate, the hasty judgment demanded by a mob of haters, and Jesus' flogging and scourging, to say nothing of the hours of torture hanging from that Roman cross!

Jesus' road is a very rough road.

--Those who are new to the Christian way, or who don't understand it very well, imagine that, when one consents to a relationship with God, the sun will immediately break out, the clouds will disperse, the flowers will burst through the soil line and instantly bloom, and everything thereafter will proceed smoothly and happily.

The road may be like that for some people, but that's not the road of Jesus.

Jesus' road is for those who, despite their sincerest and best efforts, will inspire in some only distrust and animosity and resistance.

Jesus' road is for those who will be grossly misunderstood, unfairly criticized, wrongly talked about behind their backs, and undermined at every available turn by those with hearts that are mean-spirited and hardened.

Jesus' road is for those who know what it is like to be discouraged by friendships that turn out to be bitterly disappointing, to be let down by those whom one has trusted the most, and to be abandoned in the hour of greatest need.

And Jesus' road is for those whose multiple good deeds will go unnoticed and unappreciated, and probably never be remembered; and whose occasional slip ups or failures will be trumpeted from the rooftops, and probably never be forgotten.

--Yes, Jesus' road is quite the road.

If any of this, even in small measure, sounds like it has been--or maybe now is--your road, then take heart! You're not alone.

When the road gets rough, look around. You've actually left your road; now you're on Jesus' road.