Palm Sunday in the Passion of Our Lord
Cycle A - 4.5.20
Isaiah 50:4-7/Philippians 2:6-11/
Matthew 26:14-27:66

Our Palm Sunday service would begin with a blessing of the palm branches which, held aloft, we would carry into the church in solemn procession with joyful acclamation. This Palm Sunday during a critical time of pandemic, the only procession that you could join would be a more somber one, entering Safeway’s or Trader Joe’s for necessary food, safely standing six feet apart from a neighbor or a stranger, face covered with a mask or makeshift scarf to prevent any possible spread of the Coronavirus. What we can safely share with one another is our deep faith and unceasing prayer – our belief that Jesus is our Messiah and Lord, and that our lives are in God’s hands who loves us and watches over us.

NEVER FORGET THE MELODY

Sheltering-in-place during this epidemic makes most of us thankful for Netflix and cable TV. I got to watch a recent movie I hadn’t seen called “Yesterday” – a fantasy musical romantic comedy. Jack Malik is a struggling singer-songwriter from England. His manager and childhood friend Ellie encourages him not to give up on his dreams. A strange global blackout happens. During this blackout, Jack is hit by a bus. After recovering, he sings the Beatles’ song “Yesterday” for his friends, and discovers they’ve never heard of the Beatles. After realizing no one in the world remembers them, Jack begins performing Beatles songs, passing them off as his own. He becomes popular worldwide; people are taken by storm with these catchy melodies and wonderful lyrics. Jack is getting ready to publish his first album. The producers reject Jack’s suggested titles, taken from Beatles records like the “White” album or “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” and they name the album One Man Only. On the night of the concert that will release his album, two fans approach him backstage and tell him they know the Beatles’ music and know that he plagiarized the songs. Jack is in a cold sweat, but they thank him, having feared the Beatles’ music was gone forever. Jack hugs them and confesses that was his intention all along – to bring that glorious music to a world that had forgotten it. One Man Only has brought beautiful music into the world again.

Each year we return to this week we call Holy and we retell in ritual, song and Word a story that our world too often forgets, like the blackout in the movie. The melody of Holy Week is too important to forget. It sings notes of betrayal that gives way to forgiveness, notes of jealousy that is countered by selfless humility, of hatred that is quenched by mercy, notes of cruelty that is overturned by compassion, of death that is conquered by resurrection. We retell the story so that we and our world will never forget the wonders of God’s love for creation and for all people in it.
Pope Francis in his Palm Sunday homily at St. Peter’s in Rome said: *We were put in this world to love God and our neighbors. Everything else passes away, only this remains. The tragedy we are experiencing summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others. For life is measured by love.*

Just as Jack in the movie “Yesterday” got caught up in the Beatles’ music and couldn’t bear to see it lost to the world, you and I, have been caught up in the love of God and in the paschal mystery of Jesus – his suffering and death and his resurrection to new life. Right now, with so many things out of our control, people everywhere are looking to a power beyond our own, to our God into whose hands we place our lives.

But, how will we be when this pandemic is over, when we return to our so-called “normal” lives? Will we forget the lessons we’re learning of inner tranquility without the pressure of deadlines? of the simple joys of family time together? of baking cookies and listening to the rain? of gratitude for heroes like medical professionals and vital laborers who put their own lives at risk for the sake of serving others? As we play our small roles in helping to mitigate the spread of the virus, may we learn to take seriously the things that are serious and essential to us and to all people.

Many years ago I received a hand-painted Easter card with a message I’ve never forgotten. In colorful script it read:

Jesus came singing love,
he lived singing love,
he died singing love,
... but he rose in silence.

*If the song is to continue,*
*WE must do the singing.*

I so look forward to the day when we can all sing together again in church around the Table of the Eucharist. In the meantime, keep the melody of love alive in your heart and in your home. And, as best you can, have a blessed Holy Week.

*John Kasper, OSFS*