

## Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Today we are caught between two worlds, balancing on the knife's edge of a paradox, with two dynamics seeming to contradict each other.

By definition, Sunday is the Lord's Day, the day of the week that we celebrate the Lord's resurrection. But today, the focus seems caught up in commemorating Christ's death.

Today, within the space of an hour, we are meant to both celebrate Jesus arriving in Jerusalem in triumph and to watch in shock as he dies a criminal's death.

Paradox shows up in our scripture readings in different ways. The passage from Isaiah contains both words like "those who beat me ... plucked my beard ... and imagery such as buffets and spitting."

But before that, we hear words that Jesus himself could have spoken: "God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them."

We might be inclined to focus on the abuse more than on the gift of Jesus' teaching, and lose something in the process. Celebrating the fact that the poor and weary have been roused to shouts of praise is also part of the story.

The passage from Philippians says Jesus emptied himself and, *because of this, paradoxically*, God exalted him. Emptiness leads to fullness. Pain leads to celebration. Death leads to life. Paradox!

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The presence of a paradox can make us feel uncomfortable—especially if we like things nailed down and tidied up.

If we are honest, though, each of us is a living, breathing bundle of contradictions. We're caught between the best and worst of ourselves. How do we live with these?

One thing that doesn't work is to collapse the paradox by focusing on one side only.

A prayer life has to have as one of its goals the ability to be honest with ourselves and engage in honest conversation with God. And that will mean allowing the whole truth of our lives to find its way into our awareness.

We can't be too proud to admit our need for God, but we can't debase ourselves, either, and think that we are not worth saving.

In this most painful and powerful week of his life, what did Jesus do after telling his disciples that they would betray him? "He went, *as was his custom*, to the Mount of Olives."

He kept his prayer practice going. He kept in touch with the Father. He agonized and wrestled with what lay before him—and he did it in God's presence. Then he got up and moved on.

As his last hours unfolded, Jesus remained true to himself. He stopped the violence at the time of his arrest, which could have escalated badly.

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He healed the innocent servant bystander. He continued to call out the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, coming to arrest him at night instead of in the light of day.

He warned the women he encountered on the way to his crucifixion and he ministered to the thief being executed beside him.

He emptied himself of his ego, and of any need to be the greatest. In the end, he even emptied himself of the need to succeed in his mission.

In this holiest of weeks, we give ourselves time to let all that sink in, fill us with awe, and move us to mission. The Church helps in that regard by giving each moment of Jesus' paschal mystery a place in its liturgical celebration: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, the turning point in the drama, and Easter Sunday when what had happened began to become known.

Accompanying Jesus in this liturgical journey, when his suffering, death and resurrection are made present to us again, is well worth the investment.