

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

Palm Sunday

When the early Christians spoke about Jesus, they started with the passion. For example, St. Paul said he wanted “to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (I Cor 2:2) In today's second reading, Paul presents one of the most ancient Christian hymns. It tells of Jesus humbled unto death, but now exalted above all creatures. Scholars surmise that the passion narrative, such as we listened to this weekend, circulated before the other parts of the Gospel (parables, miracles, etc.) were written down. Although it comes at the end of the Gospel, the passion is really the starting point for understanding Jesus.

Mel Gibson's movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” has helped many people appreciate the passion in a new way. To some, the violence seemed excessive, but it did bring home the severity of Roman justice. Almost every adult in the Roman Empire had seen men publicly executed. The punishment was carried out, not inside prisons, but in view of all. Before executing a criminal, the soldiers first flogged him in front of family, friends and onlookers. Then, using cords or nails, they affixed the victim to the cross. When St. Paul said Jesus was humiliated, he had that image in mind. The words “scourging” and “crucifixion” evoked horror. Mel Gibson has used the cinema to bring that horror home to us.

People have asked why we focus on Jesus' suffering when others have also suffered, some in even more horrific ways than Jesus. Yes, but it is his passion that brings together the anguish of humanity and gives it meaning; including the suffering, small or great, which you or I experience. The question is not whether we will suffer, but what we will do with our trials. Will we join them to his or give in to bitterness?

As Christians, we always come back to the passion of Christ. Not because it is the last word. The very fact that we meditate on the passion indicates that we see something beyond it. The early Christians would not have gathered a passion narrative if they thought everything ended at the tomb. It would simply have been too heartbreaking – like remembering a parent's final agony. But we know there is more, that the suffering had immeasurable worth. For that I must ask you to come with us this Holy Week as we relive the great events of our faith.

Today we celebrate Passion Sunday, better known as Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week. For the past five weeks of Lent we began Mass in silence with a penitential position of kneeling, a simple silence, a tolling of the bell and the singing of the KYRIE (Lord Have Mercy, Christ Have Mercy) during the prayers of intercession. The Gloria was not sung during Lent. We sang the Latin Sanctus (Holy, Holy) and Agnus Dei (Lamb of God). We focused on looking into the spiritual mirror and make the necessary changes in our lives. Today, this changes greatly. For example, today Mass begins with triumphal joy with the blessing and procession of the palms, re-enacting Christ's entry into Jerusalem and joyful singing.

The commemoration of the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is included at every Mass this weekend with a procession of the entire congregation. We wave our palms in honor of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. We must never waiver on this. We must always be proud to be a follower of Jesus. But are we? In our daily lives, do we act more like a follower of Jesus on Palm Sunday (honoring and worshipping him) or do we act like it is Good Friday (saying, crucify him – throughout sinfulness)?

Please remember to keep this week HOLY. I understand that many of our children have conflicts due to sporting events and/or other activities. Parents lead busy lives. This is Holy Week. Can't we put aside our regular schedules and put Jesus first this week? Let's take time as adults and parents to give good examples to our children.

A few things that will happen this Holy Week:

Holy Thursday 7:00 PM: This is the evening our Lord instituted two sacraments (Eucharist and Holy Orders) and commanded his Apostles to a life of service. Therefore, I will wash the feet of twelve parishioners. Other changes that will occur at the end of this Mass are: the crucifix, the Stations of the Cross and statues will be covered, the holy water will be removed, the altar will be stripped and the Blessed Sacrament will be brought in procession to a side altar to be adored. The crucifix will be laid on a red cloth. Oils blessed and consecrated by Bishop Callahan will be processed in.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament follows until 10:00 PM.

Good Friday 12:30 PM and 7:00 PM: The large crucifix from St. Pat's will be brought in procession and will be used for veneration. Christ died on the cross before He resurrected. I will invite you to come forward and bring to Jesus something you need to let die in your life; maybe some anger, hurt, mistrust that you have not been able to come to grips with. Give it to Jesus, let it die so you can resurrect.

Holy Saturday-Easter Vigil 8:00 PM: This evening we celebrate the greatest and oldest tradition in the Church dating to the first century. Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend the Vigil. Melanie Valerie will be confirmed at this service. She will join hundreds of thousands of others who will join the Catholic Church on the most Holy evening of the year, as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

The Easter Vigil fulfills the Easter obligation.

Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving: Hopefully these days of Lent you have spent in prayer and fasting. Have you given to those in need? Last week at Mass, Danny Gilchrist talked about how to help people in Africa have fresh water. Please look at the website: <http://sttheresefoundation.com>. Looking to help locally? Please check out: Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse. Wish to help overseas? Check out Food for the Poor. What to help out in the US? Check out Catholic Relief Services.

God's blessings, Fr. Jim Trempe