

Commentary to the Palm Sunday Gospel (A)

Passion Sunday of the Lord's Passion: No need for the Temple



There are many scenes in the Passion account from the Gospel of Matthew which we have just proclaimed. This year, a particular scene keeps recurring to me. The scene is not on Golgotha, but in Jerusalem, in the Temple. The time is at 3 in the afternoon at the moment that Jesus dies. The readings said that there was an earthquake, and the curtain of the Temple was torn in two.

What was this curtain, and how is its tearing significant? The curtain was the barrier between the Holy of Holies representing where God dwelt and the rest of the Temple representing where man dwelt. When Jesus died on the Cross, the barrier between God and man was destroyed. The Holy of Holies was also the place of the major sacrifices of the year, mostly slaughtered animals. There would no longer be a reason for man to make burnt offerings. Jesus' sacrifice made these types of sacrifices absurd. In fact, there would no longer be a need for a Temple. For now, God's People, united to Christ, would be the Temple.

The Passion reading began with Jesus proclaiming a new covenant that was being made between God and man, a covenant of blood made by His sacrifice. It is easy to get caught up in the emotions of Passion Sunday and of Good Friday. We want to feel sorry for Jesus suffering as He did. But He does not want our sympathy. He wants our union with Him in a world transformed by His Love, sacrificial love. He wants our fidelity to the New Covenant.

So this week, Holy Week, we focus on our sharing in the Blood of the New Covenant, our sharing in the sacrifice that formed a new temple, our place in the People of God. (At this point the homilist can point out the times of the Triduum celebrations. What follows are the times for my parish, St. Ignatius.) Come and join us on Thursday evening as we celebrate the solemn Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7:00 pm. Join us in consuming and being consumed by the Eucharist. Good Friday is the most solemn day of the year, a day of fasting and abstinence, a day of prayer. Cancel any plans to treat this as a day off from work or school. Come and join us at 3:00 pm for the Liturgy of the Veneration of the Cross. Join us as we unite our pains, fears, and suffering to the cross, sacrificing all for the Kingdom of God. The Tree of the Cross is a Tree of Life, not a tree of death. For on Easter Sunday, the fruit of the cross is the Life of the Lord, given to the world in general and to each of us in particular at our baptism. Come and join us for the Solemn Easter Vigil and first Easter Mass at 8:00 pm next Saturday, or join us at one of the Masses on Easter Sunday morning as we celebrate the Life that makes all life worth living.

I pray that you and your families may have a Holy Week.

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