

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 24th 2013

We are beginning Holy Week with this liturgy of celebrating our salvation. We prepare by taking little “holy Moments” to experience our need for salvation. We are freed, not only from eternal separation from God, but our being separated from ourselves, our better selves and by that from the experiences of being united with others.

We can pray with the various daily invitations to our being faithful to the crosses of our humanity and those of others. We can reflect as well upon our acts of grateful fidelity to our families and friends and our world in direct imitation of the whole life of Jesus

REFLECTION

The month of March, which in our part of the world, usually comes in like a snowy lion and prances out like a frisky lamb, has so many changes of weather. In our part of the world we can experience the warm sun today melting the snow which fell yesterday. We can have March/April showers that can bring May flowers, but also can bring cloudy days within our spirits. It is somehow fitting that the month ends the day before April 1st (Fool’s Day), the history of which is also cloudy. We are near the beginning of the growing year; at least here in the north, Spring is the new experience of time and of the life it promises.

This is a prayerful coincidence to be recalling a kind of “new year”, new life’s coming. Jesus’ life can be seen as an act of foolishness. He did some strange deeds and said some things which made people laugh or, sometimes, sneer in anger. Love is foolish at times and does strange things and goes beyond the usual, the socially acceptable.

We have several couplets in our liturgy of Palm Sunday. There are two parades described in the two Gospels for this Palm Sunday’s liturgy. One parade leads into Jerusalem with Jesus’ being welcomed and proclaimed. We could view him as doing a foolish thing as he enters the city of his arrest, suffering, and death. This leads to the other picture where Jesus leaves Jerusalem days later in disgrace and abandoned. The Liturgy of Palms and the Liturgy of the Passion bespeak the duality of our human response to God throughout history. Sometimes we welcome him in and other times we push him away.

There is in the First Reading for the Eucharistic liturgy, a submissive prophetic figure who is given to speak, but suffers for what he knows. In the Gospel, we hear Jesus not rebelling, not turning back. The words he speaks are of his personal truth and not a defensive refuting. Jesus' words are of handing over; his teachings, his body in the Eucharist, his spirit on the cross. Judas hands him over as well, but refuses to take in that spirit.

Isaiah speaks of innocence and Jesus lives his way of doing "no harm" while walking through the shame and guilt which surround him. This is the major contrast then, the gentleness of Jesus colliding with the human resistance to purity and truth.

The root meaning of the word "innocence" is not "guiltless", but "no harm". This is a prism through which we can watch Jesus while listening to the long narrative of the Passion. He lived and died doing no harm and more positively, doing the infinitely good thing.

How much ink, paint, marble, and glass has been used to attempt to express a theme, a mood, or a presentation of what it all means. We keep the memory alive each time we gather for the Eucharist. We intensify the meaning during this Holy Week which begins with this liturgy. Each conversation Jesus has, each action of his, each event of denial or injury, speaks the same reality. The apostles, the Jewish leaders, the soldiers all did not understand who he was for them. They never knew during these events what he was doing for them. The apostles slept while he prayed his obedient surrender. They fled while he remained faithful. Ah, but here is the comfort for us in it all. For all the art and words, we still do not fully comprehend the embrace. We can catch fleeting emotions and ideas about what Jesus' death means, but we have heard it all so often that the embrace can seem more like a handshake or simple nod. There is still some sleeping going on within us as we consider being loved so dearly. There is always the possibility and reality of our denials of his invitations to follow him. What do we do then; with what do we pray during these holy days of our eternal Passover?

We could just rest in the soft comfort of guilt and embarrassing shame; that is too easy and too much of the secular. We can more simply and personally be there and let it all be done onto each one of us again for the first time. We do not have the openness to take it all in at once, but we can allow some part, some word or action to embrace us this year. We pray with the words which Jesus must have spoken, "Forgive them, for they know not what I am doing."

One of the prayerful ways to receive Jesus' passion and death these Holy Week days is to consider how we might be at the bedside of a very sick or dying friend. We might want to fetch some water, plump up the pillow, straighten the bed clothing. Eventually the best and only thing we do is to sit

there and watch with our memories. These memories may bring us some hope.

There is not much we can do with the memories which make up this liturgy and this coming week. Praying might be nothing more than staying “awake” to what is being done, offered, and remembered. We know there will be a resurrection, but we know also that we are all invited to join this parade of walking faithfully with our crosses towards our own participation in that same Resurrection. Thank You, foolish Lover of us all.

“Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave.” Phil . 2,6

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