

## HOMILY IDEAS Passion (Palm) Sunday March 20, 2005

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### Scripture:

**Isaias 50:4-7:** The faithful servant resolutely focuses on accomplishing God's will.

**Philippians 2:6-11:** THE faithful servant's glory flows from His obedience to God's will.

**Matthew 26:14 – 27:66:** A Jew tells the story to his fellow Jews of a contemporary Jew being the ultimate faithful servant.

### *In Brief:*

- ***Our Christian calling is to have the same attitude as Jesus (2<sup>nd</sup> Reading).***
- ***Jesus came take away the sin of the world.***
- ***He accomplished this by being aware of sinful situations and with obedient, resolute determination (Reading 1) was an instrument for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven."***
- ***This Holy week invites us to follow the final days of the life of Jesus (Gospel) and to calibrate the pulse of our attitude as individuals and communities by the attitude that was his.***

### Some Building Blocks for developing this message:

- (A) Over 30 years ago the Church shifted the focus of this Sunday. It was renamed from **Palm Sunday** (focusing on triumphal pageantry and the behavior of the fickle masses) to **Passion Sunday** with a focus riveted on the mind, heart and soul of Jesus as he concludes the initial stage of God's redemptive work on earth.
- (B) Liturgy is the cyclic opportunity to participate ritually in the life of Jesus so increasingly our lives will gradually achieve the same focus as his, and that his attitude can become our attitude,
- Today we begin the week that concludes with a three-day-long liturgy that puts us in union with the climactic expression of the attitude of Jesus.
  - We begin a week which ends in Easter, celebrating not only the successful completion of the redemptive work of Jesus but more pointedly, our participation in that enjoying and sharing that victory through our baptism.
  - We begin a week whose meaning comes from its conclusion, the Easter Vigil and our renewing our baptismal-vowed commitment to continue living with the attitude of Jesus to complete the work of Jesus.
- (C) What was the work of Jesus, his "mission statement"?
- He is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29)
  - Sin is not only the moral transgression we bring to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sin is whatever is opposition to God's will. Wherever God's will is being violated, there we have sin. Jesus describes the content of his mission of taking away the sin of the world when describes his mission to John's disciples (Matthew 11:5) "The blind see ... the lame walk ... the leper cleansed ... the deaf hear ... the poor have good news brought to them."
  - Another way of saying: "Taking away the sins of the world" is "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What Jesus puts on our lips right at the beginning of the only prayer for us, defines his mission ... defines our mission.

(D) In today's Scripture:

- The first Reading paints the picture of a servant who will suffer because of the intensity of his resolve to accomplish God's will. We recognize that attitude in Jesus. It is the attitude which permeates his charter for our lives, the Beatitudes (Cf. Matt 5: 3-11)
- When asked, "Why are you faithful to your Christian calling," many will reply: "To save my soul – to attain eternal glory." The Second Reading presents the attitude of Jesus. The ultimate faithful servant lives his life, not to save his soul, but to be obedient, even to death, to God's will. Attaining glory was not a motivating factor for his life. His focus was always on the Father's will and others. Where is ours?
- The gospel narrative of the betrayal, suffering and death of Jesus paints for us the brutal cost to be paid by someone living "to take away the sin of the world," and praying "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." As we hear the story, Jesus challenges us as he did James and John: "are you willing to drink this cup?" (Matthew 20: 21-23)

(E) The Scripture we read today presents the reality being lived today.

- We shortchange ourselves and stifle God if hear today's gospel narrative (or see Mel Gibson's movie) and simply have our souls stirred even with the deepest sentiments of pity and gratitude for what happened 2000 years ago.

The story of the Passion of Jesus depicts the reality of one Person taking upon himself the sins of the world. Where is Jesus directing us to look when we, as the women along his passion walk, lament his pain and suffering? In my prayer I hear Jesus challenging me as he did them – to look beyond him ... to look at the sins he is bearing ... **to realize that the horror of the Passion continues today as Jesus continues to agonize under the crosses being borne by those with whom he identifies himself.**

I hear the challenge being handed me: "Where is God's will not being done in my world, in my time, in the lives of the people whom I encounter each day?" "Where is the 'sin' in my world?" "Where is Jesus continuing to bear the sin of the world today." Do I simply, helplessly and piously pray "Oh I wish I could have been Simon or Veronica and helped you in some small way on your trip up Calvary?" Or am I so resolutely obedient that I am impelled to do whatever is within my power, to have God's will be done on my part of the earth as it is in heaven?

Jesus story, as it unfolds this week, is to become a paradigm for my story, setting the rhythm to which I syncopate the pulse and rhythms of my life with Jesus Christ. In union with Jesus, I accept the fact that taking away the sins of the world is a team effort.

(F) The meaning of this week called "Holy" is rooted in next Sunday.

The reality of Easter tells us that

- The Sins of the World have been conquered.
- I share in this victory through my baptism,
- I am commissioned to share this victory with my world.
- This week's challenges are:
  - (a) *not to remain self focused* and simply rejoice in what I got,
  - (b) *not to remain in the past*, but to once again unite with Jesus in bearing the "sins of the world," and allow another step in personal transformation to happen.
  - (c) *to recommit myself* to bringing the victory of the 2000 years ago into the present and the future.

- **“Take away the sins of the world!”** This is precisely the first commission given by Jesus to every Christian on Easter night: (John 20: 19-23).

Almost the whole Christian community (not just the apostles) is fearfully assembled in the upper room. Jesus appears and directs **ALL the disciples** (not just the *apostles* but every Christian) to continue the same work he was sent to do ... “as the Father sent me, so now I send you.” Then He breathes the Holy Spirit upon them and directs them to use their power to take away the sin of the world. If they don’t, the situations violating the will of God’s will continue to bind its victims.

**“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”**

(G) Conclusion:

- Begin your prayer and reading of Scripture this week with the simple prayer to have your heart become more in tune with the attitude of Jesus Christ.
- Slowly read over one of the Passion narratives. Allow yourself to be comforted by this testimony of Jesus personal love.
- After time to experience your own feelings with Jesus, allow yourself to look beyond him ... to look to where he draws your attention ... hear him plaintively lamenting that his passion continues in the least of his brothers and sisters.
- Pray for the sensitivity to recognize him.
- Offer yourself as a Simon or Veronica, with the prayer that you may have the wisdom and courage to respond to Him whenever he enters your life.
- Own your own goodness and realize how often you have helped take away the sins of the world when you:
  - Visited someone sick
  - Cheered someone in sorrow
  - Fed, clothed, sheltered Jesus through generosity to a missionary
  - Reached out to victims of tragedies as the recent tsunamis,
  - Broke the isolation of a confined neighbor
  - Prayed for victims of abuse and/or domestic violence, our men and women in military service (and the families who have suffered a tragedy)
  - Fulfilled a volunteer post
  - Encouraged the “prophets” of today who are confronting dehumanizing social structures.
  - Etc. etc.
  - Allow the week which we call “Holy” truly be holy for yourself ... bringing you to know more richly the love God has for you and the trust God has in you by transforming you into the image of His Beloved.
  - And give yourself the precious gift Paul gave himself when he told the Colossians (1:24) “I now rejoice in my suffering for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church.” United with the sufferings of Jesus and the Church all your pains and sorrows have immeasurable worth.

Something which may be meaningful. Hand everyone a small cross as they enter. As they hear the proclamation of the Passion, invite them to unite the crosses of their life in union with Jesus. At some point in the liturgy (e.g. the Greeting of Peace) invite them to exchange their cross with someone else (preferably someone they do not know too well). Each person takes the cross home and during the week holds in prayer the person whose cross they have received. During the week everyone worshipping this weekend should know they are not carrying their cross alone.