

Palm Sunday

Year C

At the Procession with Palms

Lk 19:28-40

At the Mass

Is 50:4-7

Ps 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24.

Phil 2:6-11

Lk 22:14—23:56 or 23:1-49

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Every Christmas we display the Nativity set which reminds us of the cast of characters that form part of that story about the joy of birth. In today's Passion account about suffering and death there are many parallels to the narrative of Jesus' birth. The wooden contraption that holds the Savior is not a manger but a cross. The swaddling clothes of the newborn are replaced by the seamless tunic for which soldiers throw dice. There is no star of Bethlehem to illuminate the darkness; rather, there is only the darkness of Golgotha to cover the light of day. The lowing cattle are not there, but vultures of both the winged and human kind hover about. The shepherds and their sheep are replaced by the soldiers and their lances. The Kings from the East are gone with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; in their place stand the poor and empty-handed peasant friends of Jesus and two thieves. Mary is there again but this time she is not the young girl of eighteen filled with the joy of a newborn child. She is instead the fifty-something mother watching the death of her middle-aged son. Joseph her husband is gone; replaced by another Joseph, her son's friend.

It is this last that draws our attention this day. Joseph of Arimathea is literally and figuratively at a cross road. He must make a decision in the most difficult of circumstances. He is a member of the Sanhedrin, a powerful group within the Jewish community that was criticized by Jesus. He had political contacts; he knew Pontius Pilate well enough to demand a hearing. Both of these connections imply that he was a man of wealth, power and means. In short, he had gained much in his lifetime and now had a lot to lose. Why not run away? Why not hide? Why not think that things are too far gone and that nothing can be done? He believed in the message of Jesus, but was this enough to risk all that he had obtained in the course of his lifetime? If he showed himself to be a friend of Jesus, a man who was condemned by both the religious and political elites, he would forfeit everything. Joseph of Arimathea came to the same conclusion that Joseph of the House of David did. When Joseph, the husband of Mary, decided to marry her and not divorce her quietly, he went against the tide. He acted in faith rather than in haste; he believed in the goodness and truth of Mary. He believed in the message that had been revealed to him. Joseph of Arimathea responded similarly. He acted because he believed in the message of Jesus. To this Joseph what he believed was more important than the

trappings and prestige associated with his office; he was a die-hard believer. In a small way, the closest that many of us get to this point in our lives is loyalty to a sports team. When they're winning we love them; when they're losing, we can barely look at the sports section. A true fan(atic) loves his/her team win or lose; that is devotion, that is faithfulness, that is, in miniature the courage of Joseph of Arimathea. The Joseph at the beginning of the life of Jesus did what he needed to do to keep the Savior safe; the Joseph at the end of Jesus' life does what he needs to do so he experience salvation. In both cases it was courage informed by faith that gave each the strength to act.

As we reflect on this Passion account of the suffering and death of Jesus, let us remember the need to be stalwart in faith no matter what the circumstances or what the cost. Joseph is a model to us of true friendship and faithfulness. Jesus was such for us, let us be such for him.