

The Deacon's Bench



by Deacon
Brian Conroy

Palm Sunday: Honor, Betrayal, Suffering, and Death

Reflections
on Sacred
Scripture

Our celebration of the word today includes two distinct proclamations of the Gospel. The first, before the procession with psalms, is focused on Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. He is greeted with exuberant crowds waving palm branches, happy to welcome him to the Holy City as a king. He is riding on a donkey and greeted with cries of Hosannah! It is a high point, but Jesus knows better (and so do we).

The Passion of the Christ which follows is presented in all four of the canonical Gospels. Each Palm Sunday we hear the version from the relevant evangelist from the three-year Sunday cycle. Today we hear Matthew's Passion account. Later in the week, on Good Friday, we will hear the Passion according to John as we do each year.

These past weeks, our hearts have been battered by scenes of war and destruction, by an unmitigated view of human suffering and an upheaval in the world order. In the middle of our current dilemma, the proclamation of the Passion is so heart-wrenching, such an intense human drama, that it leaves one speechless. In fact, at a Palm Sunday Mass a few years ago, the priest asked us to simply spend a few minutes in silent reflection rather than listen to a homily. What can one say after that 'good news', after that Gospel of the Lord we just heard proclaimed?

Indeed, the Conference of Catholic Bishops recommends a short homily after the Passion proclamation and encourages the preacher to focus on the second reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians (2: 6-11). This is the Kenotic Hymn, celebrating the self-emptying of Christ that we considered on the First Sunday of Lent as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. "Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped." In the Passion account Jesus totally empties himself and gives up his own life, suffering death, even death on a cross. Here is food for thought: for what do each of us grasp? Are the things we strive for death-dealing or life-giving?

Today we begin Holy Week during which we celebrate The Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, all the way to the glorious liturgies of Easter! We encourage those parishioners who are able, to participate in all the offerings at St. Mel Parish. These include Morning Prayer at 8:15 a.m. on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Thursday at 7:00 p.m. and the Easter Vigil on Saturday, also at 7:00 p.m. For a complete list of liturgical events at St. Mel, see the detailed schedule on the back cover of this bulletin or online at www.stmelparish.org.

Our task as mature members of the community of Faith during the coming week is not to simply attend the liturgies that commemorate what Jesus did, but "to be plunged into the Paschal Mystery itself, dying and rising with Christ."*

*Homiletic Directory, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, USCCB p. 40