

Passion Sunday

March 19, 2005

Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

Preaching by S. Cecilia Canales, O.P.

It was Holy Saturday last year when a woman I know from the parish entered into the mystery of Holy Week in a very profound way. It had been a warm day and her husband of a few months had been swimming in their pool with his nine year old daughter. The girl went inside to get something to drink; when she returned after awhile, she found him dead in the pool. Apparently he had had a stroke and died instantly.

It was a shock to his family, and to the parish. He had had an active role in the Good Friday liturgy the day before—I can still see him reading an intercession from the ambo. I didn't find out until Easter Sunday when I went to morning mass and saw the wife there, very distressed. She told me the story through her tears, and then added, "But I believe God will get me through this, and he (my husband) is in heaven for Easter."

Her faith in the midst of such tragedy is such a witness to me of what Holy Week is all about. We are invited to enter into the Paschal Mystery of life, death and resurrection, not just that of Jesus, but our own. Nothing in my own life has been as dramatic as what happened to this young parishoner, but I know that daily I am asked to follow Jesus and all that may entail, embracing my crosses to experience new life, **more** life, as I die to selfishness and sin.

And the young woman's story doesn't end with the Good Friday experience of the death of her husband. I didn't see her for several weeks because she had been away visiting both of their families. When she returned, I sought her out and she gave me the news, "Sister, I can't believe how good God is to me. I am pregnant!" We both laughed and cried, that her husband would still be with her in this child conceived through their love. The baby was born a few months ago, and he is the spitting image of his dad! She is so happy for this new lease on life, for the meaning this has given her for all the suffering she endured last year.

When I feel like giving in to resentment for ill fortune, self-pity for my small sufferings, anger at God for my pain, I think of this woman, her fidelity to the Paschal Mystery in her life, and it stops me in my tracks. Thinking of her makes Holy Week different for me this year; perhaps it will for you as well. I envision an ever broadening heart that embraces the people of the world as they go through many deaths looking for resurrections!

As we walk with Jesus through these holy days, may we be mindful of all those around us in need of hope as they embrace the suffering life has brought them. We know the story doesn't end with death; rather, that is precisely where hope begins, because nothing and no one is "too dead" that God cannot bring forth life from them. Easter will come for those with eyes of faith.