

Passion Sunday

March 16, 2008

Isaiah 50: 4-7; Ps. 22; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

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Passion Sunday's liturgy can be a startling combination of impending pain and suffering wrapped up in hymns of glory. Today Jesus enters Jerusalem meek and riding on a donkey as crowds of people greet Him with "Hosanna to the Son of David," waving palm branches and throwing their garments before Him as He passes by.

"All glory, praise and honor" we sing today, echoing that procession which took place so long ago in Palestine. And yet we are already hearing Isaiah's words about a suffering Servant and Paul's hymn describing Jesus' emptying himself, taking the form of a slave--obedient to death, even on a cross. So what are to make of today's liturgy? We are entering the holiest of weeks, with Matthew's account of the passion sounding in our ears, fully aware of how the next five days will bring Our Lord's great love for us dramatically clear. We only have to listen today and enter fully into the message the Church is offering to us.

From our own experience, most of us know how times of celebration can precede times of sorrow and pain. We have learned that we have not yet arrived safely at some earthly paradise. Jesus asks us to trust in Him to see us through whatever grief lies ahead for us. His use of Psalm 22 which follows the first reading today is a pattern for our prayer when suffering, pain or disappoint come our way--absolute trust in God! This psalm was the one which He prayed while hanging on the cross at Calvary.

Each year through His Church Jesus goes before us calling us from the exaltation of Passion Sunday through the week of His own suffering and rejection to a glorious climax on Easter Sunday. May our Lord Jesus and the fellowship of our brothers and sisters at this time of grace support each of us as we renew our promise to live out our lives, faithful to the Gospel--a phrase spoken to each of us on Ash Wednesday.

Jesus has shown us the way through his example of humility and love. What more do we need? And our faith tells us that whatever takes place in our individual lives will become part of the Body of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Hosanna to the Son of David!