

Passion (Palm) Sunday

Year B

The Lord's Entrance Into Jerusalem.

On this day the Church celebrates Christ's entrance into Jerusalem to accomplish his paschal mystery. Accordingly, the memorial of this event is included in every Mass, with the procession or solemn entrance before the principal Mass.

(Gospel account of the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem Mark 11: 1-10. Isaiah 50: 4-7. Philippians 2: 6-11.)
(The dramatic reading of; The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark)

This morning we gather to remember the Passion of Jesus, and to enter its mystery. And we gather to hold holy the love that, at the one time, both opposes and endures violence; the love that made its way with a cross on its back. We gather to express our gratitude for that love, and to stand in unity with the untold numbers of people whose own courageous love makes them victims of violence.

The Cross of Jesus has not been dismantled, and the suffering which he experienced has not ceased. The Cross stands in the midst of life, not as a ritual decoration, but as a reminder that this is the price the world exacts from those who challenge, and who confront its ways with the values of the Gospel.

Could Jesus have avoided the Cross? Could he have made a detour around Calvary and continued on his way? Could he not have evaded assassination, and settled for a quiet existence in his own home region of Galilee? Did his forgiving-love require the cross?

It was not Jesus who looked for the Cross. It was the world that looked to the Cross as a way to eliminate him. The Cross was not the idea of the Father. It was the final solution, thought up by a world opposed to Jesus' way.

God-the-Father is not a cold and heartless sadist, who planned the destruction of his own beloved Son. In letting go of his Son, the Father had to be open, even vulnerable, to what would happen to his Son at the hands of others. All parents have to take that risk. God-the-Father, could do no less.

Love does not demand the Cross, but in the life of Jesus, love ends up on the Cross. That is what actually happened. And that is what continues to happen to self-forgetful love. It chooses not to avoid the suffering that emerges from its commitment. The avoidance of suffering is not love's governing passion. It cannot be!

Jesus could have avoided going to Jerusalem. He could have taken the advice of the disciples who warned him about the fate that would surely befall him there. Even so, instead of avoiding Jerusalem, Jesus enters it openly, publicly, and loudly. He doesn't disguise himself, secretly slipping in through a quiet gate. Rather, he heads a parade. He decides to confront the power that is set against him. And when he chooses to do that, like all the people who confront oppression, he makes suffering visible.

As Theodor Adorno noted:

It is a part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces.

Jesus brings suffering to the forefront. For, to have avoided suffering, he would have had to avoid confrontation with the authorities. And he would have had to suppress the very real suffering of the people, and collude in the conspiracy of silence, something he simply refused to do. And so, his love makes itself vulnerable to suffering.

Jesus could only have removed himself from suffering by keeping himself untouched by other people's pain, by making himself invulnerable, by removing himself from human relationships. But that wasn't why Jesus took on our humanity, why he came to live on earth as one of us. He didn't come to be a roaming monument, to be worshipped and adored. He was God's own love, in fragile, human flesh and bone. He was God's passion, God's overwhelming love, God's risky adventure.

Today we recall the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and we hear again the story of the Passion. But why should we remember the Passion of Jesus? Why should we keep alive the memory of such anguish and pain? Aren't we supposed to forget about past pains, and hurts, and let them slip into distant obscurity, to disappear if they can?

As Christians we are committed to being a people who remember the Passion of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, he who commanded us to: "Do this in memory of me."

When a community remembers suffering, the memory becomes a powerful protest, for such remembrance requires, indeed, it demands, a future that is more than a repetition of the past. And that is why the memory of suffering is so dangerous for those who cause it.

In recalling the suffering of the victim there is a protest that: 'this should not be repeated again'. We see examples of this in such stories as those of an extremist right-wing historian, and even a Catholic bishop, who, some years ago, were judged, to be actively denying the Holocaust, and therein, the slaughter of six million innocent Jews, not to mention the Gypsies, the physically and mentally handicapped, the homosexuals, the clergy and the religious, all in gruesomely efficient, 'production-line' gas chambers during the 2nd World War!

We should never forget! – There should be no more innocent victims!

Such memory also serves to make us aware of the crosses that are in our midst. The memory of Jesus' Passion teaches us to pay attention to the suffering of others. The cross demands that attention should be paid.

Today, we pay attention to the suffering of all who are victims of hate and violence; to victims of warfare; of tribal hatred; the ethnically cleansed; the politically violated; victims of domestic violence; of child abuse; of so very many other causes of suffering.

We pay attention to the one who, in love for all, was nailed to the Cross – Jesus Christ our Lord.