

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

Palm Sunday  
April 1, 2007  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**“No Miracles on Good Friday”**

Today is Palm Sunday, the last Sunday of Lent, often referred to as Passion Sunday, because it begins Holy Week and the Passion and Death of Christ our Savior.

It is the beginning of the most important week in the church’s calendar. Jesus turns, after three years of ministry, and he journeys to and enters Jerusalem, the City of David, the heart of Judaism. He is welcomed by the entire population as a hero, a prophet and a Messiah. They cried: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.”

The exuberance of Palm Sunday is however muted by our knowledge that only five days later the same crowd would turn against him and cruelly condemn him to death as a criminal and false Messiah.

It is because Christ knew this, and still continued his mission, that the church uses the image of the sacrificial lamb that gives up his life as a ransom for many. Isaiah in the first reading today, speaks of this resolute servant of God who is prepared to suffer rather than disobey God’s will for him.

Here we come to the biggest difference between our church and faith and the beliefs of many other churches. We belong to a faith tradition that sees value in pain and suffering. Our faith is a great paradox that out of death, defeat and failure comes a great victory. Jesus does not seek to avoid pain or death, he embraces it and in doing so he allows us to accept our human condition with all its faults and failures.

This is a very important lesson for us. We can still remember the adventure and excitement of the Gospel when we were young, but we become more aware that the great roulette wheel is spinning and we have put all our chips on Christ. We haven’t hedged our bet or laid it off. All our faith rides on Jesus being who he says he is, the ‘Son of God, the Savior of the world.’

Sometimes, we talk about our faith being a step in the dark, it is not a faith of certainty, it is a faith of trust, the trust that we place in Christ as our Lord and Savior.

This week I had two people come to my door and tell me that they had a “special knowledge,” that held the one and only truth. They had found this knowledge from decoding the Bible using the book of Revelation, and if I embraced this truth, with them, I would be saved and live on a Resurrected Earth with them forever.

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I told them that I did not want to live forever, I wanted to suffer and die as my Savior Jesus Christ did and be united with all other Christians for eternity in Heaven.

This took them a little bit aback and one of them said to me: “But everyone wants to live forever. Do you not want to be a King and Queen and rule over the entire world with Christ?”

I told her “no.” I do not wish to rule over anything and the older I get, the more I despise things. I want to be free, a pure spirit, not locked into this body that I tire of.

So she showed me the passage in Genesis and claimed God intended the world to go on forever and for us to dwell in it forever.

I was tempted to tell her that would be against the laws of Physics and that the sun can only persist as long as its atomic core lasts, but fearing that this would be lost on her, I contented myself with the thought that “an eternity of the Yankees would be more than I could stand.”

Writing this I wondered if there is a turning point for each one of us also, where death is a much more attractive possibility than we ever thought imaginable.

Because of what we believe surely we too can feel safe in surrendering ourselves into the loving arms of our God.

Don't you feel that we spend too much energy worrying about death and judgment? Shouldn't we have considered that our God is much bigger, greater and more merciful than that? The God who holds universes and 200 billion galaxies' in existence has got to be more concerned about things other than my pettiness.

Jesus, in this Holy Week, does something unique for all of us believers. He walks the walk for us and emerges beyond death to say: “Do not be afraid, I am with you.”

It is important that we in our turn walk through this week at his side. We need to be reminded of what he did for us. We are his continued ministry in the world.

After Good Friday, the cross becomes our symbol and badge of honor. We hold it up marking all that we do and all that we are about. Through it, Jesus speaks to us and says: “Do you not understand, ‘my way’ was never going to be an easy way. I have come to teach you how to be truly human. I do not offer you an escape from pain, suffering or death. I simply show you a way through it.”

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My way is the way of love. Embrace it and you will experience great happiness and also great sorrow. That is what it is to be truly human. "If anyone would be great among you let him take up his cross and follow me."

Christians today recognize that Jesus knew we were too weak and frail to ever manage 'his way' on our own. On Thursday we gather to commemorate Christ's Last Supper. When we do, we remember that in the Eucharist, with the words; "This is my body; he united us all together around one symbol of unity." We may fail as individuals, but we can carry each other collectively as 'the Body of Christ' his church.

Bishop Paul constantly reminds us of this call to be the Body of Christ. As individuals we do not have to carry the burden of "saving the world", but as "Christ's body" we do have to care for our brothers and sisters in Kajo Keji and elsewhere. This is what part-taking of the Eucharist calls us to. It reminds us that the cross calls all of us to participate in Christ's saving act.

Praise and worship is only one part of our Christian life. Penance, witness, reflection and forgiveness also play an important part in what and who we are as Christians. There are no miracles on Good Friday. On Good Friday Jesus' veins burst open as the nails pierce his hands and feet. On Good Friday, Jesus dies a cruel and ugly death, and no one comes to save him. On Good Friday, Jesus is buried in a cold stone tomb and we do not sing.

Good Friday tells us what kind of Christians we need to be. Good Friday tells us that while we have brothers and sisters whose veins are also bursting, while our human family is suffering starvation or war, drugs or aids, we have to do more than sing; we have to reach out with all the compassion of our Christ. Realize this in this most Holy Week and we will see a vision and a mission for our entire year.

Let us lift high the cross this week and huddle beneath its shadow  
that one drop of its compassion and love may change us into a church  
of compassion and love also.

Today we pray: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

Amen+

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