

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

Palm Sunday
April 9, 2006
Fr. Bill McGinty

“An Old Cross, A New Creation!”

We have come, to the end of the Season of Lent. All around us this morning is the bright red Holy Week. Lent invited us to go into the desert, examine our lives and return purified and of a set purpose. Lent invited us to climb the Mountain of the Lord and come face to face with our God. Now we have returned, today, to enter Jerusalem with Jesus, the Christ and in the next six days to re-live his final days, his trial and his death. It is a tense and intense reflection on all that we believe as Christians. There are probably a few hundred things we would rather do this week rather than remind ourselves of suffering. Go off to Florida, London or Paris or even a couple of days in Boston. But our faith this week invites us to walk closely with Jesus the Lord. For in the next few days we must be his witnesses in our world. We are witnesses to the Gospel and that Gospel is about the death of Jesus.

Today we wave Palms, on Thursday we celebrate the Last Supper, on Friday we stand by the Cross of Jesus. On that day I think of the suffering of our world. I think of Africa racked by disease and famine. I think of those countries crucified by war. I think of the blight of all who die of the cruel strangling hands of poverty and I look at Jesus dying on the cross and I pray: “Forgive us Father!”

And I am not alone. I do not stand alone and see. For God too sees. God too weeps for his children. God himself looks and sees the smallest child racked by hunger dying in filth and dirt. Does he think in that moment: “This world is not worth saving? This world is about wealth and power.” And it is at that moment that the man on the cross cries out with his dying breath: “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Were those the nine words that saved the world? Were those the nine words that touched the heart of God, because they belonged to the one voice he could not say “no” to?

Christians are people who believe that the Universe turned on that moment. Angels hid their faces behind wings. The forces of darkness receded into the night. And in that moment the Spirit of God was released into the World. That is why we wear a cross around our neck. That is why we make the Sign of the Cross to bless ourselves in Jesus name. That is why we anoint one another with oil on the forehead with the Sign of the Cross.

There have been many depictions of that moment in human history, when the Son of God died that we all might live the life of God his Father. From Cecil B. De Mille’s “King of Kings” to last year’s “The Gospel of John”. Yet, there is one scene that constantly reminds me of the true meaning of Jesus’ death. It comes in the 1960 movie “Ben Hur.” The camera shows blood trickling from the cross of the dead Jesus. As it hits the ground it mingles with the rain and flows in streams and torrents down the hill. Over stones,

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and mud like veins it spreads out, till it touches the hand of the leper girl as she shelters in the cave with her hand resting on the ground. Her realization that she and her mother have been cured is the same as our realization that despite all our faults, all our sins, all our short comings, Jesus has saved us. His sacrifice has washed us clean. We have been cleansed in the Blood of the Lamb. That realization, should warm our hearts. It should bring us joy and it should light fire within us.

If the symbol of our cleansing is water, then the symbol of our new life must be fire. It is fire of God's Spirit. We see it in the Acts of the Apostles with the disciples and then with Paul.

Paul is a man on fire. He cannot contain himself. Once Jesus reveals himself to him he must go and tell everyone. To Paul Jesus Christ is "Lord" and anything done in his name gives true glory to God the Father.

This week we too have the opportunity to rekindle that flame within each of us. On Easter night we will light the Paschal Fire that tells the world Jesus is alive in our lives. We will carry the Sacred Candle down the aisle crying: "Christ our light." We will proclaim Christ risen at the Exsultet and then we will praise God in the Gloria as the bells ring out joyfully in praise of Christ's victory over death and the birth of our salvation.

In those moments, who will you pray for? As the grace of this Easter begins to flow, who will you ask for it to flow to? I pray for a New Creation. Right here amid the beauty of these Pike County hills. Here where the river flows passed our town I pray for a New Creation. We were all invited to a Creation Party once before, but it never quite worked out. This Creation is different. This is a spirit driven Creation. This is a Creation of the heart and many hearts. Step into the river of this Creation and you are pledging yourself to build a fellowship of Christ's Kingdom here in this place. Build this Kingdom and you will have brothers and sisters so many you will not know what to do with them. Build this Kingdom and the death of one is the death of your brother. Someone cuts his hand and you feel the pain too.

Build Christ's New Creation and Shohola becomes a holy mountain, shrouded in mist where God does dwell. And we, poor mortals that we are, get another chance at glimpsing true happiness, true holiness, and true love.

So what must we do to bring that Kingdom into our midst? I believe only two things: One: We must have faith, we must believe. Two: We must put Christ at the very center of everything we are about. Every visitor through our doors is Christ. Every plea for help is - Christ. Every song we sing, we sing for - Christ. Every prayer we make we pray - Christ, because we believe amid a world of chaos and broken dreams, we believe that God the Creator of the Universe dwells here in our midst. Here he has chosen to create again, to create beauty through love, to create harmony through forgiveness, to create joy through fellowship, to create hope through worship.

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And our response can only be one of praise and gratitude to Christ our King.

Jesus is Lord.

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Come Lord Jesus into our midst. This week he live in our hearts. Come and stand by that Cross. Lift high that Cross, that we may all honor our Savior.

Amen+