

Sunday March 28th, 2021

Palm Sunday, The Passion of Our Lord

Parishioner Reflection

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Today is Palm Sunday. It is the day, as you know, that we celebrate Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem accompanied by cries of adulation from the gathered crowd who lay palm branches in his path, also, as a sign of adulation. How different this situation is from the one of Christ's passion recounted in detail in the Gospel reading for today. In many ways the account of Christ's passion shows Christ being treated in exactly the opposite way as on Palm Sunday by the residents of Jerusalem. Instead of worshipping Jesus some of the people of Jerusalem from the highest to the lowest are involved in mocking, hitting, scourging and ultimately crucifying him. In fact, Jesus' treatment by some of the Jerusalem residents, not to mention his own apostles, is such that from today's gospel reading, he sounds at the end of his life as though he believes that God has "forsaken" him. Although Luke's gospel says that Jesus' final words were, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46, NRSV). And John's gospel says that Jesus' final words were, "It is finished" (John 19:30, NRSV).

Still, Jesus knew what was eventually in store for him in Jerusalem when he returned to it on Palm Sunday. When the woman anoints him at Bethany in today's gospel, Jesus says that it is for his burial. Also, Jesus predicts beforehand that one of "the twelve" will betray him and that all the rest of them will desert him. And during the Last Supper Jesus says that his "blood will be poured out for many". And yet he still went to Jerusalem. The first reading, from Isaiah, seems to suggest why Jesus did this.

From the First Reading, we see Isaiah knew that the "Lord [had] opened [his] ear" and, so, "[he] was not rebellious" and "did not turn back". And as a result, he "gave [his] back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard" and "did not hide [his] face from insult and spitting". In other words, Isaiah submitted to insults and injuries because he knew that despite these, he was being obedient to the Lord. And because of his obedience he believed that, in the end, "the Lord God helps me" and "that I shall not be put to shame". That is, Isaiah believed that because of his faithfulness to God, God would be faithful to him and in the end vindicate him. In a similar situation to Isaiah, Jesus, also, seems to see beyond the "shame" he knows he will endure in Jerusalem to God's vindication of him and his message in today's gospel.

When Jesus says that the woman at Bethany is anointing him for his burial, he adds that “wherever the good news is proclaimed in the world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her”. With these additional words, Jesus is looking beyond his ignominious burial to the day that God vindicates him through his resurrection resulting in the preaching of “good news”. And, when Jesus says to the apostles that they will all desert him. He goes on to say, “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Again, here, with added words, he looks beyond the sad upcoming betrayal of all his followers to God’s ultimate removal of all his shame in the resurrection. Also, when Jesus speaks of his blood being shed for many at the Last Supper, he also says, “Truly I tell you I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” Again, Jesus is here looking beyond his difficult death to the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven which could only come into being after his exaltation at the resurrection.

So, may we, when we are obedient to God and suffer for it, but stay the course, as Isaiah and Jesus did, acknowledge, but see beyond our shame and suffering to the vindication that God has in store for us, our resurrection.