

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 13th 2014

Today we enter into Holy Week. The week is made holy by its celebration of Jesus' gift of himself to us and for us. Wednesday, we remember his betrayal. Thursday is a celebration of the gift of the Eucharist and a reflection on the example of service Jesus gives to us. Friday is "Good" because we truly remember how much he loved us - even with his death on the cross. Saturday we are without a liturgy and are awaiting the nighttime celebration of the Resurrection, which is his and is now ours. And, so, we begin this week with the reading of the whole Passion story - this year, it is Matthew's version. (On Friday, we'll read John's version.)

It is all so big and so full of meaning that I need to step back personally and focus on a few things, so that I don't let it just get by me so quickly.

I think the palms we receive today are a key. They are at least something to hold onto today and to keep close to us all week. Often we get them as we come into the church. We sometimes feel awkward and someone might encourage us to hold them up and wave them. It happens so fast, it is difficult to get into what is going on and to let it in very deeply. Someone once said, "You liturgy planners should remember what chaos there was in my house for all of us to get ready to get to Mass, and the conversations - sometimes yelling - that occurred in the car on the way here, before you expect us to instantly get into a liturgy when we get there."

The palms represent our not being fully ready and fully engaged in the power of this week. The story they invite us into is about the people welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem - waving palm tree branches and laying them on the road before him. They are accepting him as the one they were expecting to usher in God's promise. They shout, "Hosanna!" - God, come to save us!"

Of course, we put those palm branches down on the pew and we listen to the Passion story, which is full of betrayal. Many of the people are persuaded to turn on Jesus. "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

And, we carry that palm branch home, wondering what to do with it, wondering what it means for us this week.

This year, I'm going to cut off a small piece of palm branch and put it in my pocket. I'm going to cut off two pieces a bit longer and put one on my nightstand and put the other on my desk in my office. I'm

going to try to give them meaning, every time I put my hand in my pocket and feel it, or every time I go to bed or get up in the morning, and whenever I'm working at my computer. I want that piece of palm branch to remind me of my prayer - recognizing my desire to ask God to save me. And, I want it to represent my temptation to ambivalence, and how I am too easily persuaded by the crowds to deny my need for him.

I want to let the palm branch get me through Holy Week. I really want to let it represent my desire to let Holy Thursday teach me deeper gratitude for his self-giving love for me - so powerfully expressed in today's second reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians. I want the palm to represent my desire to be a servant for others, like Jesus, with Jesus. And, I want the palm to be with me on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, to help me stay grateful for the gift of his life for me. And, I want that palm to be close to me on Easter Sunday. I want to remember that his Passion - any participation I have in carrying my cross, in his name - leads to his Resurrection and mine, the gift of eternal life.

Throughout the year, those palm branch pieces can be a continuing reminder of how much he loves me and how deeply I want to respond, "Hosanna!" - "Save me, dear Jesus!"

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