

## Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 18th 2014

“It was the best of times and the worst of times” is how Dickens opens his book, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The readings for today’s Communion Service is a tale of two kingdoms. While there is no Eucharistic celebration today, there are readings and prayers centered around the remembering of something very good, the life-consummating last hours of the Christ.

A hero leaves, journeys, and returns with the prize of wisdom gained through the adventure of the facing of mystery. The hero’s prize desires to be shared with those who are meant to go out on their own heroic path. The First and Second Readings for this liturgy speak of two heroes who let go of former identities to become Servants of Suffering. They leave the familiar and obediently surrender to a suffering state of service.

The Gospel is an account of Jesus being both at his best and worst. The worst part is his sense of having lost, having been stripped of his dignity and purpose. His companions abandon him, his sense of his Father’s abiding care seems to be gone. He is a loser and what he came to do remains undone. There is no cheering, but sneering. There are no companions, but many on-lookers accompany him to the end of his heroic journey.

The best of times for Jesus is his staying faithful to who he knows he is. Perhaps that is the central characteristic of a hero. The triumph is self-reception over self-deception. The humanity of Jesus would be searching for validation, support, affirmation. What his humanity experienced is abuse, shame and denial. The surroundings challenge his identity and he is a winner, because he remains listening to something deeper than the voices of his surroundings.

This is the wisdom Jesus offers to his followers now. We make our way through the prayers and readings, through the veneration of the Cross toward the reception of Christ’s Sacred Presence in the Eucharistic Bread which has been consecrated at the Mass of Holy Thursday. The Christ-Hero offers us both the wisdom to continue our heroic sailing, marching, creeping along our own journeys. He, as well, also offers us the life once given for us and now offers to us with the accompaniment of his Communion with us.

We are encouraged in this liturgy to take up our heroic lives, becoming servants of the Word which we hear and the Holy Bread he gives for our continuing the listening to his call. We too will go through the worst of times and yet the best of times will be what we receive for the sharing. At the foot of the Cross we hear Jesus announce that “they” don’t know what “they” are doing. Through this liturgy we find out what he was doing and we find out also what “we” are to do. This will be our best of times. In this Jesus shares his being Hero for us and now through us.

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