

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 29th 2015

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Today is Palm Sunday, the day we hear the passion of Jesus. But this day is about much more than simply reading or hearing the passion. This is the beginning of the time when we walk with Jesus in his sorrow, his fears and his suffering. So often when we come to Jesus, it's all about us. Today, we accompany our friend and try to witness with him and support him in his last days and hours.

This is the time we have compassion for Jesus. We may hesitate and feel unworthy. How can we have compassion for Jesus?

We have compassion for the God who became man and suffered with us and for us. The root of the word compassion means to "suffer with." That is what Jesus has done for us by becoming human -- and that is what we do for Jesus this week.

Today we have two gospels – the first is read at the back of Church as the palms are being blessed. The second gospel is the story of the Passion. We are invited part to read the Passion at a deeper level. We don't just hear it uncomfortably and squirm with the stories of pain and torture. We are invited to enter into it with our hearts and imaginations.

We will walk this journey with Jesus, our friend, the one we love so much. We enter into the story as the Passover supper is prepared and Jesus predicts, "One of you will betray me."

Along with the disciples, we immediately forget our role of accompanying Jesus and we focus on ourselves. We become "distressed" and tell each other and him, "Not I, Lord." He offers his body, his blood, his life to us. We leave dinner in a confused haze of singing, as we walk with Jesus to the Garden.

It is there that he takes us aside, his closest friends. He asks us to "Sit here while I pray." He tells us of his agony, saying his soul is sorrowful, even unto death. He begs us to remain with him. But it's so very hard to stay with suffering. We all see, read and experience suffering in our lives or the lives of others. The pain of others is rarely a place we want to be and our most human instinct might be to flee from it.

Too often, in that fleeing, I return to focusing on myself, my own flaws and sins. They are familiar to me and I am more comfortable with my own sins and suffering than I am the pain of others.

The core of our own entry into the Passion is not about us but about the vulnerability we open ourselves to when we enter into the suffering of others. We might be painfully aware of our own shortcomings, no matter how much we ignore them. We know of our own impatience, our anger, and our lack of compassion for our spouse or children. As we look around us in the world, it might seem too barbaric and painful to watch or read news stories about the suffering of our brothers and sisters around the world. Too often, when we can do nothing to alleviate their pain, we simply focus on our own. We duck our heads into alcohol, drugs, anger, righteousness and being judgmental of others.

Yet, the more deeply I can be with Jesus in his suffering, watching his humiliation, being beaten, spit upon, whipped and mocked, the more I can feel the depth of his love for me. He suffers with me in all of my pain and he asks me to enter into the suffering of others.

If the suffering of others only annoys me, I can't enter into it. If I can't have com-*passion* and suffer with those around me who are in pain -- my family, my community, my world -- then I can't really feel the love Jesus had for me when he died for me.

Next Saturday night at the Easter Vigil, Mary Magdalene is told by the young man at the tomb, "Go and tell the disciples and Peter." Spread the word of Jesus and his love. Remain vulnerable to those who are in pain. Be a witness for Jesus in this world.

Most of all, we are invited to feel how deeply we are loved by Jesus – loved so much that he died for us.

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