

Year B, Palm Sunday

March 25, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

I was inspired by our Lenten program guest speaker this past month to do a little digging into Church history and traditions around Holy Week. The earliest known reference in the history of the Christian Church to an observance of Holy Week comes from a church document called the Apostolic Constitutions, dating from about the 3rd Century. This was a document laying out moral guidelines for Christian men and women; instructions for clergy and the proper observance of feast days and fast days. And according to this document, for the seven days prior to Easter Sunday – Holy Week - Christians were to abstain from wine and meat, and were to eat only bread, salt and herbs and to drink water.¹ How times have changed!

For many, Holy Week, it seems, has become less of an event in our busy lives and more about the time that passes between Palm Sunday and Easter. Oh, perhaps we might see a brief news clip of a procession of men in flowing robes, chanting in an unfamiliar language somewhere in Jerusalem...making Holy Week events more like a story from “News of the Weird” than what it really is – sacred time that we mark in our Church calendar.

Holy Week begins today – Palm Sunday. Holy Week marks a tumultuous time in the lives of Jesus, the disciples. It marks a week filled with joy and tragedy...a week filled with betrayal and fear...a week that ends in mystery and awe. Already today we can sense that turn of mood as we move from what must have been a raucous, joyous procession with Palms greeting Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem into a mob mentality yearning to see Jesus suffer.

¹ Apostolic Constitutions, Book V, Section III, p. XVIII

Holy Week really should speak to all of us. We've all had our own "Holy Week" experiences. We've all experienced dark times in our lives. Many of us have known despair as we face concerns about our health or the health of a loved one...fear for our job...worry about mounting bills. Many of us have experienced betrayal by a "friend" and we're finding out now that far too many of us have been bullied, or have experienced abuse at the hands of someone who claimed to love us. But we're in good company.

If you have ever been betrayed...if you have ever been bullied...if you have ever been hated...you're in good company, for these are the hallmarks of Holy Week, when we're brought down from the high point of the Palm Sunday procession down to the low of Jesus' betrayal and arrest and humiliation...and crucifixion.

And we see, there in the midst of the worst of humanity, Jesus standing alone. In the midst of humiliation...an island of dignity...of forgiveness...of understanding...Jesus. Franciscan Brother Richard Rohr writes in his book, *Hope Against Darkness*, "You alone, Lord Jesus, refused to be crucifier, even at the cost of being crucified. You never play the victim, you never ask for vengeance, but you only breathe forgiveness. While we, on this fearful earth, murder, mistrust, attack and hate. Now I see that it is not you that humanity hates; we hate ourselves, but mistakenly kill you."²

Holy Week shows us how we should live our lives...Jesus is the model of forgiveness, Jesus is the model for facing adversity with dignity...of courage in the face of hopelessness. As Christians the words of the prophet Isaiah should ring true, "The Lord God helps me; therefore I

² Rohr, Richard, and John Feister. *Hope against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger, 2001. 38.

have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.”³

As Christians we are not immune from suffering...we're not promised an easy ride. But as Christians we should never dwell in hopelessness...for we always have hope. And like Jesus, we can hold our heads high for we have the knowledge of a better way...we have the knowledge of a God who has suffered and knows our suffering...this same God who stands by us...supports us... loves us and calls us by name...this same God who saves us and promises us life eternal.

AMEN

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

³ Isaiah 50:7-8