

Palm Sunday 2011
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Palm Sunday is a little schizophrenic.
Our liturgy begins
with a palm parade of triumph
yet we will end our worship
in utter silence.

Dennis Michno,
Episcopal Liturgist says that,
“The dual nature of the
liturgy for this Sunday
is evident even in the title,
Today is the Sunday of the Passion:
Palm Sunday.

It begins with pomp and glory
of the triumphal entry
into Jerusalem with shouts
of Hosanna to our King.
These hosannas soon change
to crucify him, crucify him
as the passion is narrated
and dramatically proclaimed.”

Today’s ironies reflects
the dichotomies of Jesus’
entry into Jerusalem
because although the people
throw their garments
and palm branches
down before him,
Jesus knows in days
they will throw out insults
and throw away the opportunity
to spend more time
with the son of man.

Our gospel begins at daybreak
on the day that Jesus will die.
Jesus is being sent to Pilate,
the Roman governor.

Having been found guilty

of blasphemy,
the Sanhedrin send him
to the only Roman with the power
to condemn Jesus to death.
Jesus is too dangerous
to allow to live.
His message of love, non-violence
and care for the marginalized
threatens the power structure
of the religious leaders
and could grow into something bigger
than the religious
and political leaders can contain.

Here's yet another irony
for we know that
the death of this man
leads to a worldwide revolution of faith
that overturns governments, religions
and lives in ways
that are far beyond anything
the Sanhedrin could have imagined..

So Jesus is at Pilate's
Antonia fortress,
which was not only
a military garrison,
but the home of the
Roman governor as well.
It was next to the temple,
and its proximity
to the holy site
was a constant source of irritation.

John's gospel
tells us that this place
is also called the stone pavement.

Now just a few days earlier
Jesus had quoted psalm 118 --
the psalm we recited
as we came into our sanctuary,
where he announced that
the stone the builders had rejected
would become the chief cornerstone.

Indeed the stone rejected
by the faithful, Jesus himself,
becomes the cornerstone
of a worldwide faith,
becomes a rock of salvation
that changes the world.

But first he must die
and be buried in a rocky tomb,
a boulder placed before its entrance.

One of the things
that we must come to terms with
in every gospel is
that Jesus was determined to die.

He had known all along
that his ministry
in this world was finite,
that he would be dying and rising again.

And as we heard in our passion play,
Jesus yields to the Father's will in all things,
does nothing to change
the course of actions
playing out in his life.
He knows who will
betray him and when.
And he is silent.

He knows where they will
take him and why.
And he is silent.

He knows what they will
accuse him of, and what
he must say to avoid
a death sentence
and he is silent.

He does not defend,
avoid or attack
his followers,
the Sanhedrin
or Pontius Pilate.

He is determined to die,
determined to drink the cup
that has been handed him
and prepared for him, all along.

And so he suffers in silence.
Perhaps Jesus, well-versed
in Hebrew Scripture,
was thinking of the description
of the suffering servant
found in Isaiah 53,
as he stood silent
and waiting for his sentence.

Isaiah 53

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression[a] and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.[b]

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes[c] his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life[d] and be satisfied[e];

by his knowledge[[f](#)] my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,[[g](#)]

and he will divide the spoils with the strong,[[h](#)]

because he poured out his life unto death,

and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,

and made intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53

Now the Jews read this passage
as an analogy for God's
relationship with Judah,
but Christians read this passage
as a foreshadowing
and foretelling of
God's saving action in the life,
death and resurrection of his son.

Hamilton says that
"Jesus was offering himself
as a sacrificial lamb
for the sins of the world.
His death, Christians believe,
was redemptive.
It was purposeful.

Jesus did not die a disillusioned prophet.
He was not simply
a great teacher put to death
by the Romans.

He chose to go to Jerusalem,
anticipating and even predicting
to his disciples his death.

In fact -- Christians believe
that death was the vehicle
by which God
saved the world.
Hosanna in the highest.
Amen.