

Palm Sunday, 2 April 2023

Scriptures: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philip. 2:6-11; Matt. 26:14—27:66

Homily: Fr. Ken

This Palm Sunday weekend, we process into the Church with blessed palm branches in hand. We begin Holy Week, the climax of our journey, our pilgrimage through the season of Lent.

Ever since the earliest days, the idea of pilgrimage has had an important place in the life of the Christian Church. One reason is that the cross, central to Christian life and faith, is itself a journey, a difficult and challenging journey, but nevertheless a journey filled with the grace of God, the living and loving presence of God.

Throughout the history of the Church, we have made pilgrimages, discovering ways in order to make visible to everyone the meaning of the life of the Church as a journey.

The ancient holy sites of Europe and the Middle East are places of pilgrimage. Santiago in Spain, the endpoint of the great pilgrimage called simply *El Camino*, "The Way", is the site that perhaps shows this most of all; since medieval times, pilgrims have walked hundreds of miles to the shrine of St James at Santiago de Compostela. In Great Britain there is the "Student Cross", where, during Holy Week, large crosses are carried to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham from various starting points. There are also similar pilgrimages throughout the world, in Asia, and Latin America.

These journeys are, in essence, ways of sharing in that last journey of Christ to his death, and through death, to his resurrection.

The Lent we have been experiencing the past five weeks is itself a journey to the Resurrection, and it shapes our lives. It is, in a way of speaking, a Passover through the desert of the world to the heaven that awaits us,

The different Gospels describe the passion of Christ in different ways, to emphasize different aspects of the sacred event.

For Mark, one of the central factors is the refusal of Christ to be the kind of Messiah the crowd thought he should be.

For Luke, the emphasis is on the mercy of Christ: there are the women who weep for Christ, and the good thief who repents from the cross.

For John, it is the unbroken love between God as creator and Christ as savior, which is not obscured but revealed by his passion and death.

For Matthew, whose description of Jesus' passion was proclaimed in this Palm Sunday's Gospel, it is more difficult to identify. One reason for this is that the whole Gospel of Matthew is written as a continuous sequence, with Jesus preaching to the Jews first at the Sermon on the Mount, and, after his own people have rejected his mission, leading to the resounding command at the end of the Gospel: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."

Of all the Gospels, Matthew is the one that most needs to be read from beginning to end, to be properly understood. Yet Matthew is also good at breaking out of the sequence with hints of what is to come. So, the magi in the infancy narrative show that ultimately the mission of Christ is for all the world, not just the Jews. The mockery of the soldiers shows what will happen in reality, as Christ returns as king. The holy ones rise from their tombs to

show the resurrection of all the dead, and this connects the death of Christ with the past and the future.

Matthew is the most orderly of the Gospels, yet it is also a Gospel of interruptions. The magi at the beginning, and the holy ones who rise at the end, show that life cannot be kept hidden away. Eternity itself interrupts life.

When we experience the cross, we also experience the resurrection. Life on earth is never far from heaven. Yet heaven appears in some most unheavenly places. Matthew himself is an example of someone whose orderly life as a tax collector was interrupted by the call of Jesus, as so beautifully and dramatically portrayed in the famous Caravaggio painting, "The Calling of St. Matthew".

In this Holy Week, then, we reflect on Jesus' journey to the cross and through the cross to eternal life. And we can reflect that whatever difficulties we may face in our journey through this life, it is Jesus who is always with us.

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