

Palm Sunday, 10 April 2022

Scriptures: Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14—23:56

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the passion narrative of St. Luke's Gospel, which we have just listened to, we hear Christ first speaking to his friends at the Last Supper.

Jesus wants to teach them the meaning of the death he is about to undergo. He gives them his body and blood as an act of sacrifice. But that is not what they were looking for from him.

They had been arguing among themselves about their status, and about who is the greatest among them. Jesus, in response, tells them that they are not to imitate the ways of the world, where dominating power is the goal. He tells them that the one who serves others is the greatest. But that teaching is hard to accept: Among Jesus' disciples, Judas will betray him; Peter, despite claiming that he will never let Jesus down, will deny him three times. It is only when Peter is vulnerable himself and knows how he has failed, that he can turn and face the face of Jesus. His tears are the beginning of repentance, the beginning of a true change of heart.

Jesus is faithful to his word and suffers the judgement of the world. He is condemned to the horrible death of crucifixion. He is stripped naked and nailed to the wood of the cross between two criminals. He is mocked by the leaders because he does not exercise the power that would bring him down from the cross. For them he is no savior figure. But as his enemies insult him, he puts his teaching into practice and asks his Father to forgive them. As he hangs dying, weak and vulnerable, one criminal ridicules him but the other turns to him, asking to be saved:

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". He has seen in the face of Christ the saving power of God and finds redemption: "Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise".

Later this Holy Week, on Good Friday, Christ will die weak and vulnerable, committing his spirit into the hands of his Creator.

We can remember that the Gospels were written in light of the Resurrection. Without the Resurrection, they make no sense.

God did indeed vindicate Jesus and raise him to life. And it is in the light of that Easter faith in the resurrection that we will come to venerate the cross of Christ this coming Friday afternoon. Then we will know in faith that the claims of the Beatitudes are true, they do give life. Those who are poor do inherit the kingdom of God, and the mighty are sent empty away.

Whenever we turn and look on the face of the crucified Jesus we are saved if, like Peter, we can shed tears of repentance. Then we can see in the cross not a sign of weakness and shame but the sign of the power of God who works to bring salvation to us through that very weakness. The millions of innocent people who have suffered and will suffer can see in Christ crucified a sign of hope. For ourselves we see the reversal of the false values of this world and the triumph of a God of mercy and justice.

Today, Palm Sunday, we have welcomed Christ to Jerusalem; when we adore and worship Christ this coming Good Friday, we will be able to reaffirm our faith, as his disciples, that it is by his holy cross that he has redeemed the world.

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