

# The Mystery of Faith

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

Holy Week focuses all that we are in Christ and all that we celebrate in our worship of the Father. As each holy day of this week passes, the Christian people are led through the great mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. The story of so great a love is told over and over again and we are revitalized. We are moved to recommit ourselves to live in the peace of Christ, ready to serve God in each other.

This paschal mystery — the dying and rising of Christ — is at the heart of all our liturgy. It is the central mystery each rite celebrates. Holy Week provides us with a concentrated and dramatic experience of the variety of ways this mystery is expressed.

The first part of this mystery is the dying of Christ. In Baptism, we die with Christ putting to death the tendency toward evil, surrendering our slavery to sin, allowing the works of foolish pride to be overpowered. In Confirmation, our dying with Christ further opens us to the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit. To share in suffering and sickness, to commit oneself to another for life, to empty oneself in service to the People of God, to humbly admit failure and wrongdoing — these reflect the mystery of death in the Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, Holy Orders and Penance. And all these elements are made present, united with Christ and offered back to the

## INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

Father with thanks and praise in the Eucharist.

Holy Week celebrates this dying in a variety of ways. For example, the Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday is a sign of the selfless, willing commitment to the service of others that is characteristic of a life in the Spirit, a married life that is truly sacramental, a life of ordained and caring ministry. The Liturgy of Good Friday, stark and sparse, draws us into the mystery of the love of Christ and the pain of our own brokenness. The washing in Easter water reminds us of our baptism and calls us to new life.

This brings us to the second part of the great mystery of our faith; Christ is risen. Not only did we surrender our slavery to sin by our baptism, but we rose with Christ, holy as the Father is holy. Holy Week is filled with the signs and new life of the resurrection. The procession with palms foreshadows the triumphal entry of Jesus into glory, conquering the powers of death. The blessing of the holy oils at the Chrism Mass brings to the Church a consecration for ministry, a strength for mission, a healing for our frailty. The Mass of the Lord's

shows that accepting suffering was Christ's humility. His Incarnation was an act of love. But accepting the limitations of His humanity with all its sufferings — that was His humility. Acceptance, too, of the daily crosses of life constitutes the Christian's humility.

Mark's Gospel has sometimes been described as a narrative of the Passion with a long introduction. His Gospel is divided neatly into two parts. In the first section (chapters 1 to 8:26) the emphasis is on the **miraculous deeds** of Jesus climaxed in Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah. From then on, the emphasis falls on Jesus' teaching, which is directed more to the disciples than to the crowds. And the teaching is that both the Messiah and His disciples must suffer grievously to effect the triumph of God's cause. The ultimate victory is hinted at by another confession — that of the centurion, "This man was really the son of God" (Mk 15:39).

In Mark Link's **He Is the Still Point of the Turning World**, there is a beautiful reflection on the death of Jesus:

The suffering of the cross is not meant for itself, but for something else. Christ does not suffer because suffering is in itself a value, but because love without restraint requires suffering.

It is not a love for suffering which Christ reveals, but a love which prevails in suffering. It is not the physical death of Jesus which is redemptive; but the love of Jesus for us even unto death.

The death of Jesus reveals to us how absolute God's love is. God's love is unconditional, expressing itself even to the point of ultimate donation in death. We are saved not by the physical death of Jesus, but by the absoluteness of a love which did not count death too high a price.

The love of Jesus is redemptive in its absoluteness, and victoriously communicative in the Resurrection.

The crucified Jesus is a sign that Christian love lives in a threatened situation. He shows us that if we accept all the circumstances of love, love may suffer but it overcomes.

The man of faith has found a hope stronger than history and a love mightier than death.

Supper offers us a quiet bond of peace. The new fire and Easter candle, the Song of Exultation, and the initiation of new Christians are a bright reminder of the power of the risen Lord.

It is wonderful that we Christians are such a paradox: we look forward to Christ coming again in the fullness of his glory while celebrating him risen and still with us. For our liturgy — powerful, dignified and climactic as it is in the Christian life — is not quite heaven. One or another celebration might seem so from time to time, but we are still incomplete and long for fulfillment.

Our baptism and confirmation incorporate us into Christ and give us the helping Holy Spirit, but it is a life-long struggle to preserve ourselves in holiness. Penance forgives and heals us, but again and again we are overcome by weakness and seem to make no progress at all. Marriage can be full of love and happiness, but is never quite perfect; priestly service is fruitful in many ways, but fails to touch everyone; the person returned to health can fall ill again. The mighty vision of the Eucharist — a vision of inner peace and communal harmony in Christ — is often clouded, and not even seen by some.

But Christ will come again and bring us the longed-for fulfillment. Maybe more than any other reason this is why we have Holy Week: to live again the events which save us, to suffer with Christ, to wring out the emotions that involve and drain us with the hope that Christ will come again to finish the work he has begun in us. Maybe this is why the sacraments proclaim the mystery of our faith: to capture and consecrate us in this painful pilgrimage, to nourish and strengthen us along the way, to hold out to us the hope that Christ will come again!

### XAVIER CLUB

A group of Holy Cross parishioners is planning a Xavier Club reunion for May 1 at the parish school. Father John P. O'Malley of Bath, former moderator, is expected to attend. Former Xavier members are asked to communicate with Leona Hancock, 663-1124; Tom Rivers, 227-1765; or Joe Tribotte, 225-7118.

## Webster Knights Offer Seminar On Fund Raising

A week-long seminar on fund raising will be conducted here in May under the auspices of Trinity Council, Knights of Columbus, of Webster. The second of its kind sponsored by the council, it will be conducted by the Grantsmanship Center, a California-based training institute.

The workshops for representatives of non-profit agencies are designed to illuminate the complexities of public and foundation funding, to develop critical insight and to increase proposal writing skill. According to Stanley Zawacki, K of C coordinator, the program "will benefit not only the participants but all of Monroe and surrounding counties."

The earlier seminar drew representatives of 20 local agencies, including the Association for the Blind, the Hillside Children's Center, Genesee Settlement House, the Al Sigl Center and the Diocesan Office of Human Development, Zawacki reported. Further information may be obtained by calling 265-0258 or 423-4260, or by writing to the K of C, 82 E. Main St., Webster, N.Y. 14580.

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### WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 14:1-15:47. (R1) Is. 50:4-7. (R2) Phil. 2:5-11.

Beginning this Sunday, the Passion account will be read four times.

The Liturgy of this great week begins with the procession of Jesus into Jerusalem. Our Lord is acclaimed as any pilgrim would have been coming to the City for the Feast of Tabernacles — "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Jesus does two things on this occasion. First, He shows Himself the prophet by telling the disciples where to find a donkey and how to answer those protesting their taking it. Secondly, He rides the donkey to disabuse the cheering throngs of any concept that He was a political Messiah, coming to overthrow Roman tyranny. The crowds missed the allusion and failed to understand that He must suffer.

The third of Isaiah's Servant Songs introduces the theme of suffering for the Lord's servant (R1). The great christological hymn, quoted by Paul to the Philippians, tells of the humiliation of the servant who is Christ (R2). And Mark's Gospel narrates His passion and death (R3).

The Servant Songs of Isaiah were very dear to the early Christians, because they saw Christ as the servant foretold by the prophet. One of the problems confronting early Christians was, "If your Christ were God, why did His own people crucify Him?" The evangelists answered that Christ came to fulfill the will of His Father as revealed by the prophets and the psalmist (Ps. 22). He was an obedient servant!

In the beautiful hymn inserted in his letter to the Philippians, Paul

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