

Lent... A Season of Hope

Insights in Liturgy

ROBERT J. KENNEDY

Looking Forward To Passion (Palm) Sunday

It is still known by everyone as "Palm" Sunday, but the liturgy prefers to call it "Passion Sunday." For this is the day that begins the holiest week of the Christian year and opens the celebration of the dying and rising of Christ.

For this reason the Passion (Palm) Sunday liturgy begins with the commemoration of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem to accomplish

his paschal mystery. Even though palm branches are blessed as part of this memorial, the central focus is on the messianic entry of the Lord into the city where he will complete his work by suffering, dying and rising again. The procession with palms is not a mere mime of the Gospel, but the Church's ascent with Jesus to his sacrifice; Christ and his people journey together to Calvary and the great central act of redemption.

There are three options for this commemoration, a procession from a secondary place (school, parking lot, chapel etc.) to the church, a solemn entrance from one part of the church to the sanctuary, or a simple entrance to the sanctuary. All three, however, are to commemorate, if only with antiphon and psalm, the messianic entry of Christ the King.

And all three are to serve only as a beginning. For the liturgy quickly alters its focus, moving away from triumph and glory to the suffering, the passion, the cross. The opening prayers of the Mass (which serve to conclude the Procession) speak of Jesus as the model of humility and how his example of obedient

suffering reconciles us with God. The readings include the third Suffering Servant Song (Is 50:4-7), the Philippians Hymn (Phil. 2:6-11) and the Passion of St. Mark. The Preface for this Mass never once mentions the triumphal entry, but rather speaks of the dying and rising that destroys our sins and raises us up to a holiness of life.

This shift in focus is most dramatically seen in comparing the entrance antiphon with the communion antiphon. The liturgy begins on a high note of exultation: "Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." But by communion time, the liturgy (as it should always do) has plunged us into the depths of the

paschal mystery: "Father, if this cup may not pass, but I must drink it, then your will be done." (Mt. 26:42)

This reformed Passion Sunday liturgy represents the restoration of the long Roman (Western) tradition over against the practice of the Eastern Churches. Although the procession of palms has occurred in Jerusalem since at least the early fourth century, the Roman focus was always on the reading of the Passion. It wasn't until the eleventh century that a blessing and procession of palms was included in the Roman sacramentary, and the rite has always remained a modest one. On the other hand, the Eastern Churches concentrated solely on the celebration of the triumphal entry, with

special emphasis on the participation of children (based on "the children of Jerusalem welcomed Christ the King.") The passion was generally excluded.

So the Passion (Palm) Sunday liturgy as we have it today opens us onto the road to Calvary, following Christ's example of suffering so that we might share in his resurrection. We enter into the whole paschal mystery — not the mystery of death alone, but a mystery of life that triumphs over death. This is the central mystery, not only of this Holy Week, but also of every celebration of the liturgy and of our whole lives: "Father, may we honor you every day by living always in your Son." (Blessing Prayer B)

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

Sacrifice Is the Key

This question was asked by a roving reporter: "What does Lent mean to you and how will you observe it?"



Fr. Shamon

One said, "I'll observe it like any other day. I don't know what it means."

Another, "Lent is a time to renew one's relationship with the Lord."

"Lent is a time of personal spiritual renewal, which affects my relationship with others."

"Lent is not so much a giving up, but doing something positive to deepen my relationship with God... I will spend more time in prayer... sacrifice will not be the main focus of my observance."

With the exception of the first response, I enjoyed the insights given. However, what struck me in this age of otherness, was the me-focus of all the answers.

Everyone answered in substance, "I'm going to try to deepen my relationship with God and fellowman."

To me that should be the endeavor of everyday life. Lent should give an added dimension. To me Lent is a time of sacrifice: it culminates in the cross and the resurrection. The season starts with death (Ash Wednesday) and ends in life (Easter). Lent is a journey from death to life. Most of us have made this journey. But what about those who have not?

Sr. Lucia, in her gospel-like memoirs, Fatima in Lucia's Own Words, narrates this incident: "One day, I was asked if Our Lady had told us to pray for sinners, and I said she had not. At the first opportunity, while people were questioning Jacinta, he (Francesco) called me aside and said: 'You lied just now! How could you say that Our Lady didn't tell us to pray for sinners? Didn't she ask us to pray for sinners, then?'"

'For sinners, no! She told us to pray for peace, for the war to end. But for sinners, she told us to make sacrifices.'

'Ah! That's true. I was beginning to think you had lied.' (p. 133)

Note that Our Lady was asking us to make sacrifices, not so much for self-mastery, as for the conversion of sinners. She wanted us to imitate her Son. Jesus did not avoid sacrifice. He came, in fact, for sacrifice. And His sacrifice was offered, not for Himself, but for the conversion of sinners, which began at the moment of His sacrifice: the centurion, the good thief, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea.

I think we have lost this vital concept. Either we have reduced sacrifice to giving, not giving up, or have used it only to gain self-mastery. But Our Lady at Fatima asked us to make sacrifices for sinners.

In the July apparition at Fatima (1917), Our Lady showed the children a vision of hell. And she pointed out that souls were falling into hell more numerous than the leaves falling from the trees in autumn. The reason: "because no one makes sacrifices for sinners."

In this critical era of Church history, when the battle lines are drawn between light and darkness, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the Woman, one of the major weapons Our Lady said would wrest sinners from the powers of darkness is sacrifice.

Sister Lucia tells of the sacrifices she and her two companions made for the conversion of sinners. Many times they gave up their lunch either by feeding the sheep with it or by giving it to poor children. To allay their hunger, they would eat acorns, but only bitter ones. They endured thirst, headaches, family opposition, and so on — as sacrifices for sinners.

During Lent, visit the Blessed Sacrament daily, yes. Go to daily Mass, if you can, yes. Read a psalm or chapter of the Scripture, yes. Call a person a day to add sunshine to their day, yes. Write a loveletter to your spouse, once a week, yes. Pray for those in need — especially your enemies, yes. Pray the daily rosary — by all means!

But over and above these, during Lent, make sacrifices — fast!

Jesus never discussed whether or not Christians should fast. He lumped fasting in with such essential works as praying and almsgiving. The only time Jesus attacked fasting was when it was done for the wrong motives.

Fasting is "creative suffering," it is the most powerful way to touch hearts hardened to one view of reality and to open them up to love. The most effective way to convert sinners. Our Lady knew this. Therefore, she asked, "Make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners." To me Lent is especially the time to do this!

A Youthful Lent... Harmony Seen a Key

Sister Sheila led us to the bright, cozy library of Sacred Heart School, gave us coffee and excused herself. In came eight fourth graders, single file. They introduced themselves, each with a handshake, and we all sat down to rap about Lent — nothing philosophical; just the nuts and bolts of everyday living. What are you giving up for Lent?

A chorus of "candy"? Not at all. Cheryl Albano intends to "stop fighting with my brother — with his cooperation. For 40 days, uh-huh."

Christine Foley will stop "beating up my sister." (Parenthetically, "she always starts it.")

But Christine has made other resolutions. "Oh, I'm going to give up TV weekdays so I can get all my stuff done — like practicing piano, which I never do, and picking up my room, and stuff."

Dan Affronti wanted to give up homework, even school itself, but instead he has foresworn cookies. Last year it was pop, pizza and pretzels. That didn't work too well.

John Kroetz is singularly afflicted with temptations that he is determined to resist. He is giving up baked goods, "and my father has a bakery."

Christine Morgan and Cindy Yantz freely admit to a vice that they will overcome — thumb sucking. Cindy has a further plan — "I'm going to find more time... spend more time... well, I'm going to pray more."

Brian Kress is renouncing pre-suppertime television and "taking care of all my responsibilities, like keeping track of my piano books and



Dan Affronti



Christine Morgan



John Kroetz



Cindy Yantz



Brian Kress



Cheryl Albano



Christine Foley



Michael Kelly

remembering to go to my piano lesson. I am supposed to take out the garbage and make my bed and pick up after my little brothers. They make a mess!"

Back to candy, that old-time staple sacrifice, Michael Kelly alone of the eight has saddled himself with that, and it sounds like a problem. He joyously describes visions

of decapitated chocolate bunnies, the Easter morning air full of flying jelly beans...

Do they take Sundays off? (We used to, back in the days of the strict observance.) Oh, yes, they do take Sundays off.

This was March 1, the second day of Lent. And how is everything going? Oh, fine!