

Let us run in patience for the prize

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 14:1-15:47; (R1) Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11.

Palm or Passion Sunday — one day with two ideas. Palms recall Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem to sacrifice His life for our salvation. By His words and deeds — especially His raising Lazarus from the dead — Jesus had proved His right to kingship. The people greeted and cheered Him. The Gospel tells the story; the procession in our churches role-plays it.

The Gospel is the Marcan account of our Lord's Passion. Palm Sunday's cheering crowd turns into Good Friday's jeering mob. In the first reading, Isaiah foretells that God's Servant (Jesus) will submit meekly to His sufferings — "knowing that I shall not be put to shame."

The responsorial refrain is the question asked by all ages: "My God, My God, why? Why abandonment? Why all this suffering? Why pain? Why hurt? Why betrayal?"

St. Thomas Aquinas long ago asked this same question, "Why did the Son of God have to suffer for us?" He said there were two reasons: first, as a remedy for sin; and secondly, as an ex-



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ample for us of how to act.

Our Lord's Passion was a remedy for sin and all the evils consequent upon sin. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In John Paul's "Veritatis Splendor" ("The Splendor of Truth") he mentions that one of the objections to a universal and immutable standard of morality is the false assumption that man cannot measure up to it — that his passions are too strong.

The Holy Father's answer to this as-

sumption is that redemption's very idea is liberation from the slavery of sin, that His Passion enables us to control our passions. His grace is sufficient for us. He has not only washed away sin in His own blood but has also given us the strength to be victorious over sin and its consequence — death.

Secondly, His suffering is meant to be an example to us. If you seek an example of love, "Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends." Such a man was Jesus on the cross. He suffered on the cross, not because suffering is in itself a value, but because love without restraint requires suffering. What is redemptive in Jesus's sufferings is not His physical death, but Jesus's love even unto death on a cross. His death reveals how great His love is for us.

A short time ago, I saw the opera *Madame Butterfly*. The opera's theme is that of unrequited love. In *Madame Butterfly*, Cio-Cio-San, one sees a love seldom seen in a human being on earth — her love for an American, Pinkerton. The tragedy is that Pinkerton is cavalier about her love, is indifferent to it, ignores it, and finally breaks her heart by marrying another. One has but to hear Puccini's thunderous music in Act III to experience the depth of anguish that tears Cio-

Cio-San's heart apart.

When leaving the theater, however, the thought came to me that Cio-Cio-San's love for Pinkerton was but a faint image of Jesus's love for us; and that we often, like Pinkerton, shuffle off that love, ignore it, do not respond to it, and break Christ's heart. To St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Christ showed His heart encircled by thorns. He said my enemies put a crown of thorns around my head; my friends put the crown of thorns around my heart — for Love is not loved.

If you seek an example of patience, you will find no better example than the cross. Great patience occurs in two ways: either when one suffers much without complaining — He went like a lamb to the slaughter, opening not his mouth; or when one is able to avoid the cross and does not — "I lay down my life of myself, no man takes it from me." Jesus's patience was great; let us run in patience for the prize.

St. Paul wrote: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us" (Romans 8:18).

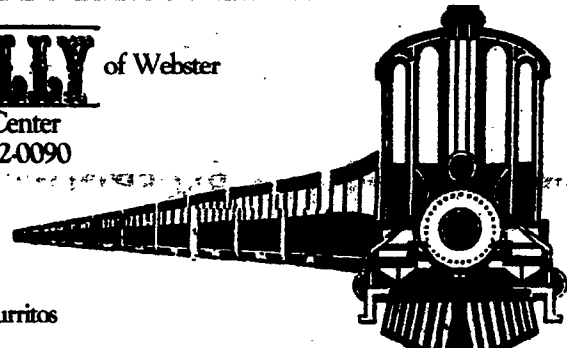
No thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no pain, no palm; no cross, no crown.

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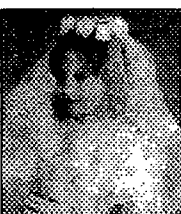
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