

Holy Week offers invitation to grow

The evening of Passion Sunday.
I am always touched by the liturgy of Passion Sunday. It begins a week we call holy and invites us to a special attentiveness to the depth and breadth of Christ's sacrifice for us.

The proclamation of the passion narrative in the Gospel of St. Matthew, while linking Jesus to the biblical tradition he loved, links him to us in his willingness to take on the human condition, even at its most demanding.

What he endures through this week would test the spirit of any human being, and is probably far more than any of us will ever be asked to endure. This attractive man, who taught with integrity, called the children to himself, cured the sick, and lifted burdens from the shoulders of others, now suffers terrible persecution.

He suffers physical torture, verbal abuse and is subject to taunting and mockery. Ultimately betrayed and abandoned by those closest to him, he is placed under a death sentence and subjected to a slow, agonizing execution by crucifixion.

Some who abuse and torture him are cowardly; some seek political gain; others surrender their good reason and sanity to the enthusiasm of the moment.

It is not an engaging or attractive moment. There is too much ugliness, too much venom, too much evil.

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

And yet ... isn't there something deeply compelling in all of it? The grace and patience and forgiving love with which Jesus responds to the death dealing that surrounds him.

There is enormous strength here and steely courage. Not once does he step back from the truth, nor does he compromise his convictions to gain favor.

Rather, faithful to his own integrity, he says what is on his mind in direct and honest ways. It is the "what" that is on his mind that intrigues me so deeply. He is hopeful for the help and strength of friends to support him in this wrenching test. He asked the God he calls his father to spare him from the test, but he does not run from it. He faces it, and, in doing, remains the loving, caring servant he had always been.

How do we respond to this as we come to Holy Week once again? We know the story very well. Can there really be new

insights or fresh gifts in it for us?

I want to say, "yes" for a couple of reasons. First, the mystery of Christ's love is so deep and so wide that no human spirit can ever contain it all. And I am convinced to the core of my being that Christ continually calls us to deeper and more intimate friendship with him. If we but open our hearts to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we open the door to renewed friendship with Christ upon which not even our faults and failings can place a limit.

Second, we change constantly. It is important for us, as we approach the celebration of the Easter mysteries, to be aware of what is happening in our life. Are there new questions that I need to face? Are there wounds to be bound up? Blessings for which I have yet to give thanks? Fears I have not known before? Pain of body or spirit that is getting me down?

This week is really about life in Christ and friendship with him. It's an open, unconditional invitation to rest and grow with him.

As we continue to pray for our catechumens and candidates, so we pray for one another that all of us will rejoice at Easter because we have realized more deeply than ever that Christ is our Lord and our friend.

Peace to all.

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