



March 24, 2024

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus...who...emptied himself taking on the form of a slave, coming in human likeness. Philippians 2:5-7



Dear Friends;

Today we begin Holy Week. We remember how Jesus' final week began with a great public acclamation in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and ends with his death on the cross. Jesus was both a religious and political leader. In the ancient world there was no separation between sacred and secular, between religion and politics. The Jerusalem Temple was the religious, political, and economic center of power in Palestine.

Every religious thing Jesus did was political, and every political thing Jesus did was religious. For example, the term "Messiah" was not merely a religious title. It was a title for the king, both a political and religious position. Jesus was a religious and political activist. His teachings focus primarily on communal and social realities, not on individual religious observance. Jesus' teachings will put him at odds with the power of the Roman Empire who will execute him for the crime of sedition. That is, he undermined the moral power and authority of the empire. It is Jesus' response to the power of the empire that gets him killed.

Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem is a prophetic sign that mocks the triumphant military victory parades of Roman generals. They entered Rome displaying the spoils of the peoples they defeated. In contrast Jesus enters Jerusalem riding an ass, while the disenfranchised and lowly people wave palm fronds and scatter them on his path.

Jesus affirms for his disciples that he is the Messiah, but then tells them not to tell anyone else. They thought Messiah-King that the Jewish people awaited would be a powerful warrior to violently overcome Roman oppression. The disciples must have been excited thinking they would soon take up swords. But Jesus tells them he and they won't pick up swords but crosses. No one expected or wanted this. Peter will argue with Jesus over this. But Jesus orders him to get behind him and follow.

Jesus did not think that violence was going to bring an end to the violence that he and his people experienced. The cycle of violence needed to be broken. Jesus was willing to exercise non-violent action to break the cycle of violence. The cross is the way that God breaks the cycle of violence. It models for us a way forward. For Jesus the cross is his prophetic sign of his self-giving love.

The cycle of violence can only be broken with non-violent action. The cycle of hate must be broken with love. The cycle of oppression and exploitation needs to be overcome with forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative justice, and the righteousness of carrying the cross.

We do not carry the cross alone. The suffering of Jesus calls us to self-giving love. This love is a call to entire communities. Jesus spoke not to individuals but to groups of people, communities, and villages, who were crumbling under the weight of economic exploitation. He commands us to care for each other without expecting anything in return. This is the cross we carry if we watch out for each other. Jesus calls us to resist imperial and economic oppression with communal cohesion. The cross is a symbol of love through non-violence. As Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached, "*Darkness cannot cast out darkness only light can do that. Hate cannot dispel hate, only love can do that.*"

Peace,

Fr Ron

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