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Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (March 28, 2010)

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Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals

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PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY
March 28, 2010

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS

The Church unites with the candidates for Baptism and challenges all the faithful to draw strength from the Liturgy of Holy Week to respond ever more fully to the gifts of Christ in his death-and-resurrection.

INVITATION TO REPENT (when there is no procession)

We acknowledge our sins and failing and rely on the heavenly Father's forgiveness and mercy.

Lord Jesus, you forgave your persecutors. Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus, you rewarded the good thief. Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, you bring hope to the faithful. Lord, have mercy.

HEADING FOR THE READINGS

Procession Gospel (Lk 19:28-40). The procession with palms draws the congregation into an experience of continuity with those who accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem. May we learn from their fickleness and find in Christ the grace of perseverance.

First Reading (Is 50:4-7). The teacher becomes a servant by listening daily to God's word. In spite of persecution he thus finds strength to pursue his mission.

Second Reading (Phil 2:6-11). In an early hymn the Church proclaims the mystery of the Word of God who became a servant to draw all into his triumph over suffering and death.

Gospel (Lk 22:14-23:56). From the Last Supper to Calvary, Luke presents the drama of redemption with special attention to Jesus' words of consolation and of prayer to the heavenly Father.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

President: In Baptism we received the benefits of Christ's work and were incorporated into his ministry as priest, prophet and king. These petitions lay a foundation for our mission.

Reader(s):

May all teachers in the Church, from Pope Benedict to all pastors and parents, find divine guidance as they continue to share the Gospel.

May these preparing for Baptism and Confirmation become vehicles of Christian faith in their response to the Holy Spirit.

May all suffering persecution or ridicule for their faith remain steadfast and soon find relief from their trials.

May all who have died in recent months, especially parishioners and members of our families, be welcomed into paradise.

President: Lord of peace, bless all who seek to follow your Son in his ministry of peace. Your grace uplifts those who are weak so that they may overcome trials. May we all pray with Jesus: Not our will but yours be done. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jesus taught by word and example how we are to pray, so we join in calling Abba, Father.

INTRODUCTION TO HOLY COMMUNION

The invitation to receive Jesus as the Bread of Life prepares each person to eat and drink at his table in the Kingdom.

COMMUNION REFLECTION

“Do this in remembrance of me!” Thus did the Apostles understand that, just as the Passover meal brought each generation to share the benefits of the Exodus, so would the Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ death-and-resurrection be *re*-presented in the ages to come. The historical events of Exodus and Calvary are bound to time and place, but God’s power and wisdom, goodness and mercy transcend these limitations. We are the beneficiaries of the effects of those attributes through our incorporation into Christ.

COMMENTARY

Procession Gospel (Lk 19:28-40). “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). From this point the Gospel presents the ministry of Jesus as a pilgrimage with a growing group of disciples. Some of the enthusiastic crowd who greeted Jesus with an echo of the angelic choir did remain faithful through the Passion (23:48-49). “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (19:38; see 2:14). May we keep the palm branches as a reminder of Christ’s presence with us on our pilgrimage through this life.

First Reading (Is 50:4-7). The mysterious Servant of the Lord is chosen for a mission, endowed with the Spirit to bring forth justice to the nations (Is 42:1). First he must listen to God’s word; each morning his confession of faith begins with the call “Listen, O Israel...” (Dt 6:4). Thus God opens the ear to receive instruction and gives the assurance of his sustaining presence throughout the trials that beset a faithful teacher.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 22:8-24). Luke did not use this Psalm to convey the loneliness of Jesus as he faced death (see Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34) but this response to the persecution of the Servant evokes the Church’s prayer in union with the crucified Lord. The section selected for the liturgy ends with a note of victory (22:22-24) as does the end (22:29-31). Probably those who hear the Gospel proclamation of Jesus’ words in Aramaic took the first verse (22:1) as a signal to consider the entire psalm, concluding with its message of hope.

Second Reading (Phil 2:6-11) An early Christian hymn incorporated into St. Paul's letter to the Philippians presents the Gospel teaching of Jesus’ triumph over death powerfully and succinctly. Jesus' death was not an execution but was his act of obedience to the heavenly Father. Thus did he put the teaching of God's servant into action. In most cultures, people place all their emphasis on *winning* --- and many show no compunction about violating principles to attain this goal. Do we believe deeply enough in Christ's power to follow his example? "Your attitude must be that of Christ!" (Phil 2:5). Otherwise our world will not learn the lesson that is needed so urgently.

Gospel (Lk 22:14-23:56). Luke described Jesus' public ministry with a special emphasis on his continual communion with his Father in prayer, especially before each new stage in his work (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1). This theme pervades the Passion narrative as well, beginning at the Last Supper as a Passover Meal with the Hallel Psalms (113-118, 135-136). Simon, alerted to his coming denial, was assured that Jesus has interceded for him (22:31-32). The example of Jesus at prayer in the garden was accompanied by the command to imitate him (22:40-46). As Jesus suffered he prayed that the Father forgive his executioners, and by extension all who sinned against justice toward the innocent (23:34; see 1 Cor 2:8). Ps 31:5, part of Jewish night prayer, was on his lips as he died (Lk 23:46). Thus Luke, who recorded four beautiful prayers in the infancy narrative (1:46-55, 68-79; 2:14, 34-35), has described the Lord's pattern of prayer as a key to a deeper appreciation of his obedient service of the Father and of his patient love for humanity.

REFLECTION

Whether the action thriller is a cowboy movie or a kung-fu film from Hong Kong, the struggle between good and evil is always violent. Does "popular culture" in East or West see no alternative to the use of force for asserting rights or overcoming malice? If this is the message that pervades modern societies, are we surprised that young people everywhere seek "power" through possession and use of weapons?

The ancient world into which Jesus came was similar to our own time. Large armies exerted the will of emperors over unhappy neighbors and bandits made travel hazardous. To see beyond such dilemmas to an era of peace, pious Jews reflected on the message of Israel's prophets. Most popular were passages of their teachings that promised a virtuous king who would vanquish evil, just as his ancestor David had conquered the Philistines. As with Moses before him, David gave the credit to God (see 1 Sm 17:45-47) and this is recalled as Jews prayed for strength under oppression. "You delivered Goliath of Gath, the mighty warrior, into the hands of David your servant, because in place of the sword and spear he put his trust in your great Name" (Qumran Scroll, *War of Sons of Light* XI:2). It seemed to many that even God must use force to crush the military or physical might of the wicked.

During the Babylonian Exile (587-538 B.C.) the chosen people began to hear a different message. A prophet following the inspiration of Isaiah applied the master's teaching of a peaceful future (Is 2:2-5; 9:5-6; 11:1-12) to the very process of education. The ideal teacher would bring forth justice without dominating over or crushing the weak (Is 42:2-3). Learning through continuous intimacy with God (Is 50:4-5), he would be patient even with those who persecuted him for his words. Relying on divine assistance, he would resolve debates, not by force but by a court case. "If anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together. Who disputes my right? Let him confront me!" (Is 50:8). Thus he drew upon the insight of the great Isaiah: God's law should be the basis for resolving potential conflicts and God himself will be the judge (see Is 2:4).

Through the teaching ministry of Jesus, his constant message was that violence and malice must be faced with prayerful equanimity (Lk 6:27-36). The Passover meal celebrated Israel's peaceful departure from Egypt and a victory over Pharaoh's army that belonged to God alone. Jesus also looked ahead to the situation when all would acknowledge God's reign over them (Lk 22:14-18). Tragically, the disciples were not yet fully with Jesus, so he counseled them to prepare for their flight and isolation. Then, probably in a tone of irony, he advised each to buy a sword (22:36-38)! Separated from him they would come to rely only on human resources; thus they would realize that these are inadequate and often a source of injustice.

Like the servant described by Isaiah, Jesus accepted trial in court as the way in which his cause could be vindicated. However, the legal system works only when those in authority do not manipulate the laws to their own purpose. Like countless innocent men and women throughout history, Jesus was condemned because Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate were willing to sacrifice principle for expediency. The most important witness in human life is offered at the moment of death. On the cross, Jesus forgave those who contributed to his suffering (23:34); he inspired a criminal to pray in faith (23:42) and he himself died with a prayer on his lips (23:46). This witness led others to believe, at least in an inchoate fashion. "The centurion... gave glory to God by saying: 'Surely this was an innocent man'" (23:47).

Only through faith in the divine ordering of the universe and historical events can people find a viable alternative to violence in efforts to preserve life. The Gospel points beyond the crucifixion to the new life that Jesus enjoyed as risen Lord.