



CYCLE B

Mark 11:1-10
(Gospel for the Blessing of Palms)
Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Mark 14:1-15, 47

GATHERING

(A simple cross without a corpus is draped in a red cloth and displayed in the gathering place. Palms from the past year, some thorns or nails are arranged near the cross. When people have gathered, the cross is passed to be venerated in silence by each member.)

The members share briefly what has died in this week for the sake of the Gospel and new life?

OPENING PRAYER

(The community pauses for a few moments of quiet, then prays the following:)

- I. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High and abides in the shade of the Almighty says to the Lord: "My refuge, my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!"

- II. It is he who will free you from the snare
of the fowler who seeks to destroy you;
he will conceal you with his pinions
and under his wings you will find refuge.
- I. You will not fear the terror of the night
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the plague that prowls in the darkness
nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.
- II. Upon you no evil shall fall,
no plague approach where you dwell.
For you has he commanded his angels,
to keep you in all your ways.
- I. They shall bear you upon their hands
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
On the lion and the viper you will tread
and trample the young lion and the dragon.
- II. Since he clings to me in love, I will free him;
protect him for he knows my name.
When he calls I shall answer: "I am with you."
I will save him in distress and give him glory.

Psalm 91:1-6, 10-15

Focus Question

How do you find confidence, clarity and hope when faced with life's hard times, paradoxes, ambiguities and tensions?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(In place of the Passion, the Gospel for the Blessing of Palms is read aloud, along with the other readings of this Sunday.)

Commentary

The readings invite us to listen and, in our own way, relive the passion of Jesus. Imagine yourself in Jerusalem as word reaches you that Jesus of Nazareth is entering the city in triumph, a festival of hope. With wide-eyed wonder and anticipation you wait and see. Then, ambiguously, Jesus rides in meekly and humbly. Then, paradoxically, days later, the crowd yells, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" What are we to think when faced with such tension, such ambiguity? What can we learn from the passion of Jesus?

It is very difficult to imagine anyone not moved by the passion story. It is a drama played out in us and around us all the time and in every human life and situation. These passion events present us with dissonance, ambiguity, paradox, ambivalence: from reeds to thorns, from the Hosannas to scorn, from the mighty ruler to convict, from triumph to tragedy.

It is a cosmic bittersweet struggle between heaven and earth, between good and evil, between life and death, between darkness and light. This drama is played out in very human, real episodes: from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the disconcerting shock of crucifixion; from the anticipation of the folks for a new king to their astonishment when they face the suffering servant; from the reverent anointing of Jesus by the woman to the poignant betrayal of Judas; from the anguish of Jesus in the garden to the torpor of the disciples; and from the faithful single-mindedness of the centurion to the weakness and shortcomings of the disciples.

What arises from this drama, from now until Easter, is that the passion involves conflict. It is a discovery that we exist in the tension between "Hosanna" and "Crucify".

It is a realization that Christian life is composed of an inseparable, yet paradoxical bond, between Passion and Easter. It is not a matter of choosing between dying and rising, between palms or thorns, between triumph or tragedy. It is an intersection and reconciliation of the two realities. It is Easter that gives meaning to the Passion which turns the cross into victory. This truth provides the contours of our Christian living: a truth that reveals that death and rising are inseparable parts of a whole life in Christ.

Consider parents sending their first-born off for the very first day of school. Here are feelings of ambivalence and tension between letting go and protection. The reflective Christian knows that life is full of paradox, mixed signals and shaky starts. Yet, the Christian also knows that God is able to bring forth life from death, truth from falsehood, grace from sin, clarity from dissonance and confidence from fear. We know that death is inseparable from Easter and we are confident that there is always a tilt toward triumph.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. How do you feel when you read or listen to the Passion of Jesus? How does Jesus' cross and victory affect your daily life?
2. Speak about an experience where there are *hosanna* and *crucify* moments in your life.
3. Who are the people of our own day that seem to be painfully aware of the paradoxes of life? What do you learn from them?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Leader: In the light of our sharing of life and faith over the scripture for this week's liturgy, what does God ask of you, personally; what does God ask of us as a community? *(After an extended pause, the leader invites responses from the community.)*

Suggestions:

1. Reach out to a family in your parish or community which has recently experienced the death of a loved one. Help, in simple ways.
2. Help a youth, facing the perplexing issues of our day, find creative and concrete solutions. Be a big brother or a big sister. Assist in a confirmation program. Support a youth in a court-appointed probation case.

3. Identify and study an issue of local or global conflict. Take some action on gang violence, just and fair health care, or world hunger.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The cross is once again passed among the members to be venerated. Then the hymn, "Before the Fruit Is Ripened by the Sun" is prayed.)

- I. Before the fruit is ripened by the sun,
Before the petals of the leaves uncoil,
Before the first fine silken root is spun,
A seed is dropped and buried in the soil.
- II. Before the Easter Alleluias ring.
Before the massive rock is rolled aside.
Before the fear of death has lost its sting.
A just and loving man is crucified.
- All: Before we gain the grace that comes through loss,
Before we live by more than bread and breath,
Before we lift in joy an empty cross,
We face with Christ the seed's renewing death.

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(The community departs in silence. No refreshments are served following this session.)

