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“Dying As He Lived”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Passion/Palm Sunday (Year C)

March 20, 2016

Isaiah 50:4–9; Philippians 2:5–11

In the Liturgy for Palm and Passion Sunday, there are many readings assigned to it. They are long, and they demand our close attention. Often, preachers have taken the position that the texts should speak for themselves and that the Word should be heard without many words. But let me offer you a few angles of vision as you prepare to hear Luke’s account of the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First of all, note the paradoxes and the contrasts. We walked in with our palms raised high, celebrating Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And yet we know he entered that city facing resistance, facing accusations, which ultimately led to his fearful and disgraceful death. Note as well that Jesus wept for the city as he entered. Note as well the women who represented the city wept for him as he walked to Golgotha to face his execution. He was accused by his own, surprisingly, and yet Pontius Pilate was hesitant, and he ultimately allowed the execution to occur. Even in the debates over whether or not he was King of the Jews, the kind of kingship confused them. They were so politically minded, and yet we know that Christ’s kingship, his reign is embodied on the cross. Listen to the paradoxes and the contrasts of the way in which Luke weaves his story of the saving death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we heard the magnificent poetry of Paul in Philippians where Paul reminds us that Jesus emptied himself of his divine status by entering fully into our human condition in all ways. His solidarity with us is complete. We have seen that

in the course of the stories that we have heard from his birth to his baptism. He shared with us all joys and all sorrows. Yet we cannot hear this passage or the Passion account without bringing to mind the suffering of others. Here in the city of Durham, in our own community, whether it is grief or physical illness, or in the communities beyond us, where communities are faced with terrorism or civil war, and all other conditions of suffering. In the case of Jesus, the immensity of his love and the totality of his submission to the events of his life in this Holy Week are motivated by the core attitudes that kept him faithful and obedient to the mission entrusted to him by God to the very bitter end. For all of us who have been baptized in the death and resurrection of Jesus, as Zuri-Munai was just moments ago, this week we call holy is a reminder of our dying and our rising. Let us know that the power of love and life is at work in us through the sacraments, through our works and practice of service, in our relationships one with each other so that the saving grace of God is alive in us.

As we listen to the songs, as we sing those songs, hear the Word, and pray our prayers, as we celebrate the sacrament of baptism, I hope all of these moments give us the thoughts and images that make special this week we call Holy Week. The last word given, as you will hear, is given to the executioner, who has observed for us all that certainly, without doubt, this man, Jesus, was innocent.

Influence: Monika Hellwig