

THE EMMAUS SERIES

Passion Sunday, Year B

Isaiah 50:4-7

Philippians 2:6-11

Mark 11:1-10, 14:1 – 15:47

The mood is set for Holy Week

Reflective awareness of what God has done

As we come to know the liturgy better we recognise that it is a masterpiece, wisely shaped over the centuries as the Holy Spirit has guided the Church. Today, as the greatest week of the Church's year begins, the lesson of the liturgy is astoundingly restrained and simple, yet so appropriate.

We are reading from Mark's gospel. In his very simple telling of the story the brief acclaim of the entry into Jerusalem is in contrast with the stark horror of the story of the passion. The people cry out that 'the kingdom of our father, David, has come'. How ironic is the way in which these words are to be fulfilled!

The reading from Isaiah invites us to learn from the example of the Saviour - the confidence we should have in our Father in heaven, whatever the trials we may face. But it is something else which makes the reading so appropriate on the threshold of Holy Week – with him we must have minds and hearts open to a new meeting with our God in what lies ahead. Like God's Servant we should be glad that the Lord 'wakes us to hear, to listen like disciples'. We are invited to learn something that it is beyond the power of human words to express; to learn anew the astounding generosity of our God as we meet it in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus – to find how true is the old saying, 'Actions speak louder than words'.

In the second reading, from the letter to the Philippians – echoing a hymn used in the liturgy of the first generation of the Church – Paul summarises with majestic brevity the drama of what God has done in the Saviour's PASCHAL MYSTERY: how he 'emptied himself', shared our human condition, even to 'accepting death on a cross', and finally, how he is now 'raised high', one with the Father in the glory of the divine name.

The principal reading, of course, is the telling of the story of the Lord's passion and death, confronting us in Mark's factual and forthright style, with the cruelty and horror of a horrendous miscarriage of justice. In the darkness which descends upon 'the whole land', the rending of the temple veil 'from top to bottom', and the confession of the gentile centurion - 'In truth this man was a son of God!' - we have the dawning light of the new order of things which will be inaugurated with the Saviour's resurrection.

Actions speak louder than words. The age-old custom of preserving the palms from this day's liturgy is a wonderful reminder of how real was the drama which opened the way to eternal life for the whole world – a drama in which we are all involved. The liturgies of the Church's coming celebration of the Paschal Mystery will teach us, not with fine oratory, but by recounting the great events in which the divine Truth found expression in our human history. Let this recognition set the tone for our participation in the liturgies of Holy Week.

John Thornhill sm