

Homily for Palm Sunday 2010

By Fr Michael Casey

What a great transition we have experienced this morning. We began with cries of "Hosanna" and the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, only to be exposed to the horrors of the Passion and the grim finality of the grave.

Who among us can begin to comprehend the nightmare through which Jesus passed? Uneasiness with the unreality of the crowd's exultant welcome was quickly transformed into foreboding, and thence into the dread that accompanies the certainty of disaster. Think of the effect of Judas' betrayal, of the loneliness caused by the incomprehension and flight of the disciples, the powerlessness of being taken and bound and dragged away. Consider the anguished prayer and the sweat of blood. How can we describe what Jesus felt as he endured the injustice of a mock trial, and the insults and petty cruelty of hardened soldiers? And what must have been the impact of the massive rejection of the crowds among whom he had so recently walked, healing and comforting and proclaiming Good News? And there was the physical torment of scourging, crowning with thorns and stumbling up the hill to the place of crucifixion. He was condemned alongside criminals, shamed before the mocking crowds, lifted up on a cross of unimaginable torture. And then, seemingly abandoned even by God, he died and was laid in the earth.

Is there any human suffering that Christ did not endure during the period of his Passion? Was there any cell in his body that did not cry out in pain? Was there left to him any shred of dignity or comfort and support?

The story of the passion sears our imagination. We cannot begin to conceive what Jesus endured. We want to cover our faces and turn aside. Yet, year by year, the Church confronts us with this narrative, but it does so in the sure and certain hope that what we heard today is not the end of the story, but only its visible form. The evangelists described Jesus' suffering fully aware that he had already risen. The Passion story is like a traveller's tale in which dangers and disasters are described extravagantly, once the safe haven of the destination is reached. The Church dwells on the unspeakable torments of Jesus only to emphasise the fact that, even from such agonising hopelessness, deliverance is at hand. If this week we ponder the emptying of Christ, it is only to set the stage for next week's triumphant celebration of Christ's glorious resurrection – and the beginning of our own.

The Passion narrative is also our story, who so easily lose heart when confronted with pain, rejection and inward turmoil. What is so apparent to us now need not be the end of the story. For us, as for Christ, there is a future, a future that it is in the

hands of our loving Father. Christ has died – certainly – but Christ has also risen. We must die, but we shall rise with Christ. This is our certainty and our faith, knowing full well that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Even though our life is full of moments of hardship and failure we can say with St Paul, “in all these things we have overcome because of him who has loved us”. We listen each year to the story of the Passion of Christ to re-affirm our hope in the new life offered to us. We too shall overcome because of him who has loved us.