



PALM SUNDAY

Year C

Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14-23:56

GATHERING

(A bible open to this week's gospel and a crucifix rest on a table covered with red cloth.)

The Passion narrative this week draws us into walking with Jesus in his self-surrendering, self-sacrificing journey toward the cross. In so doing, we seek to make his walk our own. Last week we reflected on the mercy and compassion of Jesus toward the woman caught in adultery. How have you shown mercy and compassion this past week to someone who perhaps might be considered by some to be *unworthy* of it? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader calls members to a prayerful attention to God's presence with them. After some minutes of quiet, the community prays as follows in two alternating groups.)

I: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

II: In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

I: Beside restful waters he leads me;
II: he refreshes my soul.
I: He guides me in the right paths
for his name's sake.
II: Even though I walk in the dark valley
I: I fear no evil; for you are at my side
II: With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.
I: You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
II: You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
All: Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD.

Psalm 23

(A selection of reflective instrumental music is played.)

Focus question

- ◆ When have you experienced rejection, hatred and violence?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

On April 4, 1968 at 7:05 p.m., civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was pronounced dead – the victim of an assassin's bullet. The tragic end of this great leader was the continuation of an undying movement for justice

and equality. Dr. King was fully aware of the risks. In a speech some hours before his death he remarked, “We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. Like anybody I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will.”¹

But what is God’s will in the face of hatred and persecution?

At the Garden of Gethsemane we see Jesus in deep emotional and spiritual pain – “sweating drops of blood.” He has given himself in service to God and man – preaching, teaching, healing, forgiving – and for all that he faces crucifixion. His disciples are physically and spiritually asleep. Think about it, Jesus could have easily disappeared into the dark of night. But he did not. He surrendered to God with the words, “not my will but yours be done.” Jesus made a choice to remain faithful to the end. Is this not why we love him so?

We are disciples of Christ the king – called to march in Truth and in self-surrender – choosing God’s will over our own. It is a challenge. Not much in the world around us honors that kind of life. While we may not be faced with martyrdom, we are nevertheless called to a life of *self-emptying*, as described in Philippians. Through prayer we remain in communion and in communication with God. Through the practice of emptiness, we let go of attitudes like narcissism, greed, control, fear, prejudice, hatred, and others that lead to sin and violence.

In the week ahead, we will be invited to enter ever more deeply into the self-emptying prayer of Christ. The church invites us to immerse ourselves in each of the Triduum *moments* (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil) in the central mystery of Jesus’ dying and rising, so that we ourselves engage this mystery in the depths of our own hearts and lives.

Because we are an Easter people, we know that the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ overpowers sin and death. As we observe Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, let us march into Holy Week choosing God’s will over our own.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

¹ **Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, Stephen B. Oates, Penguin Books, New York, 1982.

- ◆ How have you come to know God's will for you?
- ◆ How did you experience God's presence in that difficult situation?
- ◆ What has doing God's will cost you?
- ◆ What does being "empty" mean to you?
- ◆ Where are you clinging to your life, rather than surrendering to life in God? Why?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Enter fully into your parish celebration of the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil). Schedule at least 10 minutes of prayer time on each of these three days to prepare for, and then reflect back on these *moments* of the mystery of Christ. Focus on areas in your life that keep you from doing God's will and begin to let go. If you are inclined, journal the experience.
- ◆ Find a spiritual director who is trained in helping people understand God's will in their lives. To locate a director in your area, visit the Spiritual Directors International web site (www.sdiworld.org).
- ◆ Be a *Simon of Cyrene* this week. Help a friend carry his/her *cross* by making time for him/her – listening deeply and with compassion. Invite the person for coffee. Send a card or suggest seeing a movie that might be helpful. Invite the person to join you in the Triduum celebration.
- ◆ Explore resources on non-violent communication and action at the Center for Non-Violent Communication (www.cnvc.org) and Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal/Gandhi Book Centre (www.mkgandhi.org).

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the leader invites members to the Passion narrative with an ear to how Christ speaks to them at this time of their lives in this celebration of Holy Week. The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful attention to how Christ speaks to them through the Passion narrative. After

this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them. When the sharing is complete, the prayer continues as follows.)

All: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Leader: All who see me scoff at me;
they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads:
“He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, if he loves him.”

All: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Leader: Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;
They have pierced my hands and my feet;
I can count all my bones.

All: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Leader: They divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.
But you, O LORD, be not far from me;
O my help, hasten to aid me.

All: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Leader: I will proclaim your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:
“You who fear the LORD, praise him;
all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!”

All: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Psalms 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

(The session concludes with members praying the Lord's Prayer with hands extended. There are no refreshments served at this session. The community disperses in silence.)