

## The Passion of Christ

**Is. 50: 4-7; Phil. 2: 6-11; Mk. 14: 1-15: 47**

This Sunday is Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday, the day that marks the beginning of Holy Week. Jesus enters Jerusalem hailed as a king and within a week He is reviled as a liar.

The events of Holy Week are laid out like a Shakespearean tragedy. In a Shakespearean tragedy, the hero, a person of high standing experiences a complete reversal of fortune and, after exceptional suffering and calamity dies a humiliating death. Also, the last week of Jesus' life is played out like a movie or television drama complete with betrayal (Judas sells Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver), cowardice (Peter denies Jesus three times to save his own skin), plotting and scheming (the chief priests and scribes plot to have Jesus killed), and abandonment (Jesus is abandoned by His followers).

Certainly Jesus' life during Holy Week resembles that of a tragic Shakespearean hero. He enters Jerusalem as a conquering hero to the acclamation and hosannas of the crowd. But, by the time He enters into His Passion, He is the object of derision and ridicule. He is welcomed in Jerusalem as a king and saviour, but, in a short time, He is thrown out of the city as a criminal and an imposter.

In the beginning, Jesus is extolled with praises. By the end, He is heaped with insults. In His triumphal procession, Jesus is greeted with palm branches; in the Passion, He is struck on the head with a reed. People lay their cloaks in front of Him as He makes His way through the crowd. In His Passion, He is stripped of His clothes and they are gambled away. On the Cross, Jesus suffers a Shakespearean hero's tragic fate as He dies a cruel and humiliating death.

But, unlike the drama, Jesus' death is not the end. The people who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and death probably felt abandoned by Jesus. They may have felt privileged to have received Jesus' teachings and witnessed His miracles, but, they probably thought that it was just a wonderful period of time that had come to an end.

We have the benefit of almost two thousand years of hindsight so we know that Jesus' death was not an end but, rather, a beginning. We know that at the moment of His greatest indignity, Jesus achieved His greatest triumph.

Jesus said: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.' His crucifixion accomplished exactly that. People the world over have come to believe in Him. Jesus hearkened back to the Old Testament passage where God punished the Israelites in the desert by plaguing them with poisonous snakes. When the Israelites complained about the snakes, God told Moses to put a snake on a pole so that, when the Israelites looked at it, they would be protected from death.

Jesus was saying that anyone who looked at Him on the Cross and believed in Him would be saved and would have everlasting life. This is why we have the crucifix prominently displayed in our churches, in our homes, and around our necks. The crucifix is not simply a decoration or a piece of jewelry. It is central to our Christian belief. We look at Jesus on the Cross and believe that He died for each and every one of us so that we might have life in eternity. As we enter Holy Week, let us draw ever closer to Jesus and follow Him through His Passion confident that soon we will experience the triumphant joy of Easter.