

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday March 28, 2010**

Palm Sunday C 2010

*(Sermon delivered from notes – this is a recreation):*

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In the Name of our one, ever living, ever loving and ever sustaining God:  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

What can anyone say after hearing the Passion Story? Our service today is like a wild rollercoaster ride. We started with the Liturgy of the Palms, remembering Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowd shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" and waving palm branches as they greet their Messiah. Then we move to the dark side of human nature – to the Passion, where the crowd shouts, "Crucify him!" It is a story for our times. How do you move from adulation and hope to revilement and violence in the space of a few days? It is a story of desperate expectations, power, and political expediency all culminating in violence and death.

The crowds were powerless and oppressed not only by Rome but also by Herod and the Chief Priests who taxed the people to buy their power from the Emperor. They looked for a Messiah, a king, to give them what they wanted – a return to the times of King David. Their hopes and expectations all lie in the past – the glory days when David was King 1,000 years ago and they were a victorious, mighty nation and secure. Hence, the wild adulation of anticipated victory!

But there was another procession entering Jerusalem that same day at the other end of the

city. Pilate was leading the Roman legion from Caesarea (Caesar's new port city on the coast) into Jerusalem to keep order during the Passover festival – a time when pilgrims came from all over the Empire and a time when trouble was known to happen.

The Temple authorities feared a rebellion that would bring Rome in and end the status quo and their positions of power. It was a touchy time and they had reason to be concerned about keeping the peace. Jesus' death warrant was uttered by Caiaphas, the High Priest, when he said to his colleagues assembled in the Temple: "You know nothing at all. It is better that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." Jesus was to be a human sacrificial victim – sacrificially offered - not to God - but to fear and political expediency.

When it became evident that Jesus was not going to meet the crowd's expectations of reestablishing a mighty kingdom, they turned against him. All that Jesus' enemies needed to do was to incite the crowds by manipulating their frustration and anger. It doesn't make any sense to blame any one party because, one way or another, they were all involved. The oppressed and the oppressors could now make common cause in an act of injustice and violence against an innocent scapegoat – this Jesus of Nazareth. Don't look for any sense in this. There's no sense in it – just fear, hatred and rage. It is, indeed, a story for our times.

It was a huge sin – one we still commit. It is the dark side of human history – achieving and retaining power by inciting anger and fear and then directing it at some scapegoat. We are all complicit. We all need forgiveness. We act this way not just in government. No, we act this way each day in offices and workplaces, in schoolyards and, God forgive us, sometimes even in our own families.

There's no happy ending to today's liturgy. We will leave with an abiding sense of evil and, hopefully, with a lot to think about during Holy Week. This isn't an outdated, "once upon a time" story. It is life. It is about the dark side of human nature. Perhaps the structure of today's

Psalm might give us suggestions for what we need during Holy Week:

**Candor:** What about my fears, disappointments, resentments and anger? What are they?

Where do I direct them? Where might I look for scapegoats? Do I actively join in or am I just complicit by my silence?

**Confidence:** Do I believe that God doesn't intend this and that there is a better way to true peace and justice as shown in the life and person of Jesus Christ?

**Petition:** Can I ask God for forgiveness and the grace to change?

Let us leave church today to do our reflections and say our prayers and, on Good Friday, let us wait in silence.

Amen.