

Passion Sunday – April 5, 2020

Isaiah 50: 4-7 – Philippians 2: 6-11 – Matthew 26: 14 – 27: 66

The dynamics of Passion or Palm Sunday change dramatically. The celebration begins with the joyous shouts of “Hosanna” as Jesus comes to Jerusalem with his followers to celebrate the Jewish Feast of the Passover. But the mood of the liturgy quickly changes. The central focus of the Liturgy is then the recalling of the passion and death of Jesus, this year as presented by Saint Matthew.

In his account of the betrayal, suffering and death of Jesus, Saint Matthew is addressing the community of believers who made up the early Christian church. Like Matthew, most of these individuals had their roots in Judaism and were particularly familiar with the Scriptures of the Old Covenant. With this in mind, we can appreciate the emphases found in Matthew’s gospel.

On the one hand, the Passion of Jesus was a fulfillment of the Old Covenant writings and teachings. What Jesus underwent in his passion and death was understood as part of what the Suffering Servant of Isaiah would reveal concerning the loving relationship that was established between God and humanity.

On the other hand, while Jesus had foreknowledge of what was to happen to him, he freely embraced the suffering he was to

endure. In this manner, Jesus was in command of what he experienced as it was the culmination of the effort to restore the loving relationship between mankind and God.

Unbelievers could hear this account and find it to be a story of a man being abandoned by his followers and even betrayed by one who had been close to him. These same unbelievers would see this account as another example of how the supposed religious leaders of Jesus' own people condemned him and turned him over to the civil authorities to be executed.

But to those who put their faith in the person Matthew was describing, this was **the** moment. Jesus Christ,, of his own decision and will – even though struggling in his humanity with this choice – seized upon the suffering and death on the cross as the means to redeem us, to reconcile us, to empower us to rise above sinful distancing from God. In so doing Jesus offered to us the loving salvation that had been promised through the words and actions of the Old Covenant. Thus were those promises fulfilled. Thus was revealed the depth of love offered to us by our good and gracious God.