

Palm Sunday 2006

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest! In a few short days, Jesus went from receiving those highest of accolades and enjoying a triumphant entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem, to receiving the scorn and disdain of the people to whom he was sent: “Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying: Ha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself by coming down from the cross. Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him.” What did the crowds see in Jesus that made them turn so suddenly, and so starkly, from welcome to revilement? Once Jesus is given his sentence, and he begins his journey of suffering on the Way of the Cross, he no longer had the appearance of one who had come to conquer. The people had seen in Jesus the wisdom of his teaching, and his spiritual power demonstrated through many miracles. On the road to Calvary they saw physical weakness, as he fell repeatedly into the dust as he carried his cross, and as he required the assistance of a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, to help him bear the cross so that he could carry it to his execution, to a death even more painful and humiliating than collapsing along the way. If Jesus was the powerful king they expected, why was he falling? Why was he carrying a cross at all? They saw the suffering and pain which he was enduring along the way: look and see whether there be any suffering like my suffering. It was prophesied that the Messiah must suffer; yet, through this pain, Jesus does not look strong enough to save himself, much less the Jewish people. They see genuine humility, as Christ endured not only the blows but the mockery and scorn of the people whom he came to save; it must have been hard for them to imagine any king putting up with such abuse; indeed, how could a man who could face such a barrage of blows, both physical and emotional, be the anointed one, their king?

Of course, we know that our Lord's Passion was not about what the people saw in him, or even about what any of us see in him today. This torture that Jesus went through was about what he sees in us, in mankind, and what he sees in us merits to him at least, what he went through. What we thought was his weakness as he fell along the way, was surely his strength as he considered *our* weakness. How *we* desire to do good, yet keep choosing evil; how *we* fall again and again, repenting again and again, but falling again in weakness, again and again. He knew that *we*, in *our* weakness, needed the graces which only he could gain, and he knew that if those graces were to be gained, it would be by him finishing his journey to the hill where his cross would be lifted up. While we saw him bleeding, and cringing in pain while never uttering one word, it was *our* suffering which motivated him. He knew the physical pains which sin brought to man, and he knew as well the emotional and spiritual pains which so often drive us in our actions. He saw in us pitiable creatures, who without his passion taking place, had no hope whatsoever. He knew *our* destiny without *his* suffering, and that destiny could never be heaven if he would not come as man, and go before us to open the gates of heaven. While we saw him putting up with all of this abuse, and not even putting up a fight, he had in mind our weariness; how over time we are tempted to just give up, and not fight sin and Satan anymore. Our lack of resolution comes from our weariness in fighting; Jesus' humility,

was pure strength of resolution, that he would win this fight. And his fight was not to stay alive, but to overcome death by first experiencing it.

When we're attacked and mocked, be it by hands and fists or by words, one of the first emotions we usually experience is retaliation: maybe you got me this time, but next time, I'll get you. How similar was Jesus' attitude on the cross; how different the meaning of the words when applied to him. Upon his cross, even as he struggled for breath and endured the excruciating pain, Jesus could look upon the people whom he loved. His mother first, of course, and then his disciples, the women at the foot of the cross; but also soldiers, thieves, scribes, Pharisees, servants, the whole gamut of humankind: and to them, "I'll get you." Not, "I'll get even," but "I'll get you." He would get us, all right: gain us for his kingdom, steal us away from Satan, who up until then had the power to dominate us, but who would soon lose his claim to us. Jesus would snatch us away from eternal death, and gain us for eternal life with him. Blessed indeed is that kingdom that is to come; blessed indeed are we who understand that the day of our Lord's Passion is not the day upon which he succumbed and gave up, but the day on which he kept going until his mission was completed: a mission not to his benefit, but to ours; a mission to gain life for us, and to gain us for life in him.

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