

Palm Sunday  
March 28, 2010  
Fr. Tom Elliott

## Redemptive Suffering

Luke 19:28-40  
Isaiah 50:4-7  
Psalm 22  
Philippians 2:6-11  
Luke 22:14-23:56

Jesus knew what was going to happen. He had told His disciples about it on numerous occasions. In three different places, the author of the Gospel of Mark records Jesus telling His disciples and all three conversations sound about the same.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus said, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise.”

-Mark 10:33-34

The three “Passion Predictions,” in the Gospel of Mark remind us that Jesus knew He was going to suffer and die and that it was going to take place in Jerusalem. Had He wanted to avoid suffering, He could have probably still gone to Jerusalem, but, rather than letting people see Him, He would have needed to remain hidden. He had done this before on at least one occasion.

The author of the Gospel of John tells us about Jesus going to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Tabernacles. Some of the people who were close to Jesus wanted Him to go to Jerusalem and manifest Himself to the world. However, Jesus explained to them, “My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, because my time has not yet been fulfilled” (John 7:6-8). We are then told that Jesus “also went up [to Jerusalem], not openly but (as it were) in secret” (John 7:10b).

Today, however, we celebrate a very public entrance into the holy city. Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem represents, not His desire to be honored, but rather, His *obedient choice* to suffer and die for us. He knew that if He revealed His presence in Jerusalem, the people’s love for Him would set in motion His suffering and death. He knew that the people’s devotion to Him would be more than the religious leaders would tolerate. And so, the real “triumph” of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem had to do with His obedient choice to suffer and die for our salvation.

As Christians, you and I are often invited to suffer. Suffering is always a *choice* in one of two ways. In some cases, we have the option to either avoid the suffering or endure it—like when we voluntarily choose to fast from things we love. At other times, the suffering is unavoidable—like sickness—yet our *response* to the suffering is our choice. We can choose to

---

<sup>1</sup> The three Passion Predictions in the Gospel of Mark are in 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33-34.

wallow in self-pity and anger, or we can choose to suffer with gentleness and peace, offering our suffering to God as a very particular and powerful prayer. The Church calls our choices to prayerfully suffer, “redemptive suffering.”<sup>2</sup>

Saint Paul offered his own explanation of redemptive suffering in his letter to the Colossians when he wrote, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). Paul is not saying that Christ’s suffering was insufficient, but rather, that His suffering continues through His Body, the Church, for the sake of the Church. Each time you and I consciously, prayerfully, and peacefully choose to suffer, it is a profound participation in the Body of Christ and a profound prayer for other people. It is also a time of great intimacy with Christ (since very few people are with Him in the garden of suffering) and it is when we are most *like* Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate Jesus’ triumphant choice to suffer and die for us, let us be aware of the areas of our lives where the Father is inviting us to consciously, prayerfully, and peacefully suffer for others.

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Read the three “Passion Predictions” in the Gospel of Mark (8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34) and pay attention to how they are different. Take a few minutes to reflect on how God has invited you to suffer recently. In what ways have you experience self-pity and anger during your suffering and in what ways have you experienced peace and an intimacy with Christ?

---

<sup>2</sup> Here’s an article about redemptive suffering-- <http://www.fisheaters.com/offeringitup.html>