

“Honor and Shame through Suffering”

Last Sunday, we heard that Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples and a crowd of Jews as the “Son of God” by raising Lazarus from the dead. Today, in our Gospel, we heard about Jesus being honored as He entered Jerusalem on His way to His passion and resurrection.

In the 6th century BC, (Before Christ), Prophet Zechariah one of the Minor Prophets in the Hebrew Bible had prophesized about the Messiah’s riding a donkey. **“Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is He, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt”** (Zech. 9:9). That is why we have palms while honoring Jesus similarly to what the great crowd of Jews who honored Him did with their cloak and leafy branches on that blessed day in Bethany.

This is in contrast to what happened six days later in the passion of Christ where Jesus seems to be shamed by both the people He called His friends and by those who were His enemies. Earlier in the Gospel, two of His disciples had said they could drink the cup that He would drink. Peter and the other apostles had said they would die with Him. Judas then betrayed Him by a kiss. Jesus in the eyes of His enemies was subjected to a shameful death as a criminal on the cross between two thieves. Though to one pagan Centurion, it was an honorable or manly death.

By His death, Jesus honored the will of His Father. In the garden, He was confused and agonized about the will of His Father. In His prayer, He probably asked Himself and His Father if He could save the lost people He came to seek, without having to suffer and die a shameful death.

We too have our struggles with understanding suffering. Most of the time, we are shamed by it when it is a public suffering. Many people blame their suffering on God. When problems come our way, does it make sense to blame God? For some, it helps them to cope with tragedy, while others turn their backs on God and say He is a mean and uncaring God. Is that fair to our God who gave up His only begotten Son to suffer and die for us? It is only through Him we can rise above all circumstances.

We have a Savior who was lifted up and exalted because He emptied Himself of His divinity so He could draw us to Himself and keep us under the protection of His wings. He became one of us in order to show us how to live. He asks us to honor Him by emptying ourselves and putting on Christ so we can let His word be a lamp to guide us. He capped His teachings by laying down His life for us on the cross. Recordings of His passion and death recounts the extent to which He willingly offered Himself for us.

For those of us who were at the three-day presentation of the Shroud of Turin, we were vividly put in the presence of His Passion, death and Resurrection. For me, it was as if I were there 2000 years ago to see Him suffer for me. The presentation brought the account of His Passion, death, and resurrection alive and opened a new and better window for me to understand the Gospels, and the Mass as we celebrate the representation of His total gift of Himself to us.

As we come to receive His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Eucharist, let us empty ourselves for His sake as He emptied Himself for our sake.