

Passion Sunday Year C  
Passion According to St. Luke  
March 20, 2016  
St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Mixed Emotions

*"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.' When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things."*

Not Even 3 months ago we were celebrating the birth of Jesus this past Christmas. Blink and here we are at Holy week talking about His death.

John F. Kennedy was President for 1000 days or so, and then he was killed. That is about the same span of time we are talking about here with Jesus. About three short years of public ministry. Blink and you could miss it. Well, not really. Each life, however short, shaped our history: one for more than a generation; the other for several millennia.

We began today with a happy, triumphant parade. We end the day with the Passion Gospel in seeming defeat. What a mix of emotions in less than a half hour! How can we make sense of that?

You don't have to live long to realize this is a truth about life. There are always highs and lows for all of us. One moment everything seems to be going o.k., and the next moment

everything's a mess. One moment everything seems on track for a success, and then it all falls apart and we want to search for where we went wrong, how this failure came about. Is it just my bad luck? Did I make a mistake?

*So you complain that you had a bad day? You complain that you feel like a victim? You grouse about how unfair your life is?*

How about God? Consider what he went through: He was betrayed and abandoned by all of his friends and associates. He was betrayed to the authorities by a man who was supposed to be his friend, who did so by means of a kiss. He was mocked, ridiculed, and many bore false witness against him. He was whipped and beaten. He was humiliated in the biggest way you could do to a Jew, by hanging him on a tree, with his blood pouring out of his wrists and feet making him untouchable and unclean. He was abandoned by all except for his mother, one other woman and one disciple who stood at the foot of his cross. He was stripped butt naked and hung up there for all to see, and even the criminals who were punished with him mocked him. And he died in this humiliating and excruciatingly painful way, both physically and psychologically, and shall we add, spiritually? Now, *have you ever had a day as bad as that?*

It's not a contest about who suffered the most, Jesus or me? If it were, I think the winner would be obvious! However, we can surmise that some human suffering may meet or exceed that of the passion. The inhumanity of man is astounding and incomprehensible.

But I find it a comfort that the *God of the whole universe* experienced all this stuff. God is not disconnected or aloof from what it means to be human, what it means to fail, to suffer, to be

humiliated and abandoned. God is not disconnected from suffering, but rather, through the events of *the passion*, he is intimately connected with it and aware of our experience. We are therefore never left alone to face the dark valley of the shadow of death, for God has walked there before us, and is walking with us in our hour of trial. And amazingly, God still cares for us and understands our sufferings, even though, for the most part, we left God alone with his. The fact that God is with us and understands our sufferings and does not leave us alone, is not only a comfort, but a good thing and good news for us.

One detail we have to note. All of the events of the passion did not "*just happen*" to Jesus: *He chose them*. He was forewarned and knew what would happen when he set foot in Jerusalem. He even knew who would betray him and how: with a kiss...a knife in the back delivered with one of the greatest signs of affection and respect. Talk about mixed emotions! Yet Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem, not because he would be the center of attention, or to receive a temporal crown, but rather God knew he had to face all this for us. He had to go to Jerusalem because it was the consummation of his ministry on earth, the ultimate conclusion, the punctuation mark at the end of his teaching. To be the King, to truly live, one must be servant of all and lay down your life for your friends. And we **are** his friends.

When we find ourselves in the valley of the shadow of death and despair, more often than not, it is because we have chosen to walk there. Yes, sometimes it is an accident. However, if we are honest, we can also *own* that it was our choices that brought us there. And we made those choices with the knowledge that we had forewarnings about the risks associated with those choices, so we cannot or should not claim that are honestly not surprised

when we arrive there. So it is often our own choices, consciously or unconsciously that bring us to this place of testing.

Who would want to choose such a difficult path? Who would choose to suffer for another? Who would place themselves at risk for another, especially a stranger? Those who do are the heroes of our Christian faith. Many are unknown, known only to God. They make these choices every day. Open your eyes and will catch a glimpse of them.

Jesus lifts high the cross, and drags it through the streets of Jerusalem, in stark contrast with another parade, the Palm Parade we just re-enacted. It is a lonely parade. Physically weakened by the abuse he has suffered, he is unable to carry its weight and another man, a stranger, Simon of Cyrene is pressed into service to help him complete the walk to Golgotha.

So what does it mean to take up our cross and follow him? Lift your cross implies a conscious choice, a choice to live your life for others and not merely for yourself. It implies a choice to live your life for God. It is not about a contest to see who can suffer the most. It is not about being a martyr. To live righteously is to live a life for others. This is what God showed us by his life and Passion. This is what God asks us to do, when he invites us to take up our crosses and follow him.

*The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." Amen.*