

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Phil. 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 – 23:56]

Once upon a time, a little boy had a devastating blood disease but recovered. However, his sister was not so fortunate. She needed a transfusion and because the boy had the same rare blood type, he was asked to donate his blood to his sister. He seemed stunned, but wanted to help his sister and agreed to do so. As the process began, he smiled at his sister bravely, but by the time it was over, he seemed tense and quiet. The silence was broken only when he looked up and asked, “Doctor, when am I going to die?” He’d thought that giving his blood for his sister would mean that he was going to die. Yet even believing this, he had managed to say, “Yes.” Imagine that!

Palm Sunday is more accurately called Passion Sunday. In this context, Christians often assume that “passion” is the word for the suffering and anguish of Jesus’ death. However, the word first describes something felt deeply, powerfully, almost absolutely. The story of the little boy, recounted by Robert Emerson Coleman in his book *Written in Blood*, reminds us that a person can love so passionately that she or he would be willing to give up life itself out of love for another. The solemnity of this day and the reading of the Passion of Christ means most when we realize it’s not just about the pain. It’s about the love (meditation by *Father Larry Janowski*).

If Holy Week had ended on Good Friday, we might call it an Unholy Week. It would describe only too closely the path of Isaiah’s faithful servant, who comes to rouse hearts, yet endures a brutal reception as his words fall on deaf ears.

Passages from prophecy and psalms warn us down through the centuries that being just and innocent in no way guarantees success.

We like to think of religion as spiritual life insurance. If we walk the moral line, God will protect us from all harm, keep our children safe, fend off disease, and spare us from evil times. But Scripture reminds us repeatedly that it doesn't work that way. The most obedient man who ever lived was arrested, humiliated, tortured, and killed by a means that would make a delicate person look away.

If we learn anything from Passion Week, it's that being good is no inoculation against suffering. But this isn't the takeaway lesson of Holy Week. Through it all, we catch glimpses of the love of the merciful Father in whom Jesus put the strongest kind of trust. We see this mercy in the meal Jesus transforms from a simple supper to a promise of everlasting life. We hear the tinkling bell of hope in the assurance Jesus gives Peter that despite an initial failure to respond with courage, he'll find the grace to be strong in time.

Jesus restores the ear of His enemy's servant, damaged during His arrest, as if He didn't have more pressing concerns to worry about! Though Jesus shows such attention to a servant, He ignores the powerful people who stand before Him that day: the governor from Rome and the king of Judea, either of whom could have spared His life. The Way of the Cross, we come to recognize, is not primarily about suffering, but about the path of God's loving mercy. It is the safest journey any of us can take. Let us take it with Him this week (meditation by *Alice Camille*). AMEN!