



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Second Reading Philippians 2:5-11
Gospel Luke 22:39-23:49

I hope that you realize that the whole point of Palm Sundays isn't the palms. That's why some people recommend that we call it "Passion Sunday" instead. That runs a lesser risk of making this into something like the Baguio Flower Show. It also recognizes that one of the most important parts of today's service is the (admittedly lengthy) reading of the entire story of Jesus' last hours on earth.

But even if you keep the tradition of the palms today, the leaves themselves aren't the point of even that rite, but the *procession*. We are invited to walk, together, from point A to point B- reenacting in our small way the entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem. It is, of course, an *ironic*, almost cynical thing to do. The people who welcomed Jesus, who called him their king, would soon be those who abandoned him and asked for Barabas to be released by Pilate. We, too, betray and deny Jesus every time we decide not to take seriously our own loyalty to him as our King.

But there is another procession that we have heard about today- Jesus' last journey on the way to Calvary. This is a route that is ritually reenacted by many people during Lent. It is called "Stations" or "The Way of the Cross." Since the Middle Ages,

the various episodes in this journey have been symbolized by artwork in churches- like our set of the Stations here. I would like to say a few things about them now.

The devotion known as the Stations of the Cross is only moderately controversial- even some Protestant churches use a form of them during this season. In its basic form, the devotion is largely biblical and the stations which aren't specifically related to the Gospels simply "fill in" some events that *could* have happened, even if they are not mentioned in Scripture.

More controversial than the idea of the Stations of the Cross has been the artwork that characterizes our own set. They are prints of paintings done by a German priest named Sieger Köder. For many, these prints have just been background art this season. For others, they are the focus of the prayers and readings of Lenten Fridays and therefore can't be ignored. Each must be looked at for a few moments. This can be disturbing, because while the artwork is somewhat abstract, it is powerful and contemporary, too. Some of them are notable:

The 4th Station shows the moment when Jesus encounters his mother Mary on the way. We don't even see their faces for this powerful moment- only the hands of mother and child.

The 7th Station shows Jesus falling. The images around our Lord are those of vice and addiction- as if Jesus is identifying with those who are "fallen" in other ways- those who are at their lowest ebb.

At Station 8, Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem. But it is not only they who are represented, but their *children*, too- and they are shown representing four different races. This reminds us of the danger our children are in from a fallen "grown-up" world in which they can, quite literally, be held hostage to politic ambition and greed.

By the 10th Station, Jesus is being stripped of his clothing. We see the “seamless robe” that was to be his Church. How significant that this vestment isn’t being ripped by Roman soldiers here, but by the *clergy* of four different Christian traditions- competing with and against each other.

But perhaps the most dramatic of all is the 11th Station in which Jesus is nailed to the Cross. People look at this one for some time before they realize what they are seeing: the circle of blue is the sky, seen from Jesus’ own perspective flat on his back with the soldier’s hammer poised to strike. Those forming the circle, looking down on this terrible act are angry, bored, morbidly curious or amused. They are people like you and me forming the “gapers’ block”- the ghoulish gawkers who not only “know not what they do”, but they *don’t even care*.

To follow the sequence of the Way of the Cross is to relive what we have just heard in the Passion narrative. It reminds us that Holy Week is here for a purpose. It’s not just a school holiday and the chance for travel, but a gift from the Church to you to allow you to take seriously the most important death of a human being ever. But please remember, it is not our efforts during this week that makes it holy- not our devotions or fasting or our last-minute attempts to “do something.” What we are commemorating is what has already been done- at a terrible cost and as a sign of impossible love.

In the words, not of the devotion of the Stations of the Cross, but significantly enough in the liturgy of *Holy Matrimony*, we pray: “Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life.”

May God bless to us the proper use of this most holy week.