

Homily for Palm Sunday, 2022



The Passion, as we heard in that first gospel reading, begins with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem not on a throne surrounded by dignitaries, but on a beast of burden surrounded by peasants looking for hope. This is the tipoff that we are dealing with a very different king. I would like to look at a passage from the beginning of the Passion and a passage from the end of the Passion. Both

passages tell us how this very different king, Jesus, sees things differently and how he is inviting us to see differently as well. And from those new eyes, perhaps new attitudes and new actions will flow from within us.

Towards the beginning of the Passion, after sharing the bread and wine, his Body and Blood, we hear Jesus say, ***"The kings of the Gentiles (those not connected to God) lord it over them; and those in authority over them, are call benefactors."*** Benefactors, what a joke! ***"It is not to be this way with you"*** (you who are connected to God). ***"The greatest among you must be like the youngest, and the leader among you must be one who serves. For who's greater, the one at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table?"*** Of course, it is. ***"But I am among you as one who serves."***

Jesus is clearly the Master, yet he comes to us as a servant. For he tells us himself, ***"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve."*** He doesn't come to us as a benefactor. What a joke that is! A benefactor has influence and money and shares with only those people who he or she deems deserving. Jesus does not act as a benefactor or a philanthropist. He has eternal life and offers that eternal life to anyone and everyone, not just those deemed "worthy." He gives his life equally to the saint and the sinner, the good thief and the bad thief, the so-called worthy and the obviously "unworthy."

This is Luke's version of the Last Supper. In John's version, which we will hear on Holy Thursday, it's even more stark and blunt. Jesus, in John's gospel, ties a towel around his waist and washes his disciples' feet, like a common servant. In that version of the Last Supper, Jesus says, ***"You call me Master, and you are right, for that is what I am. Yet, as your Lord and Teacher, I have washed your feet as an example of what you ought to do for one another."***

We might think Jesus is calling for a reversal of roles, for he does say in other parts of the gospel, ***“The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”*** If he is calling for a reversal of roles, then those who were on the bottom, powerless, and belittled can now take their turn on the top and lord it over their one-time oppressors. However, I don’t think Jesus is advocating a role reversal. He has already told us he is not into the game of tit-for-tat, an eye-for-an-eye. What wrong with the eye-for-an-eye game? What’s wrong is that the eye-for-an-eye game turns into an eye for an eye for an eye for an eye, etc. It takes on a life of its own and draws us into a spiral of violence that never ends. To that world, Jesus says, ***“Put your sword away, enough of this!”***

Jesus’ world is not a world of tit-for-tat, or a world where roles are reversed, or a world where the biggest swords or biggest guns win. Jesus’ world starts with destroying the categories of first and last forever. But let’s be honest, when it is to our benefit to be part of the “in” group, we like to keep a comfortable distance between ourselves and the “out” group. We must keep the *status quo* at all cost. I do it all the time, and most of the time I do it unconsciously. Yet, I do, do it. When the shoe is on the other foot, however, and we are unfortunately part of the “out” group, we immediately cry foul. This is not right. This is not fair. Those on the top must be toppled and toppled immediately. Who do they think they are?

“Who is greater, the one at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

Here is another way that Jesus destroys the categories of master and servant even, and especially, when we want to keep those categories going. It’s a little more subtle but just as thought-provoking. This one comes at the end of the Passion reading we just heard.

It says: It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until about three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The curtain in the temple was not a cheap, little, shower curtain somebody got off the discount rack at Walmart. This curtain was massive, some 60 feet by 30 feet and four inches thick. It weighed over a ton. Its function was to separate the inner section of the temple from the outer section. The inner section was considered holy, in fact it was called the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest was considered holy enough, worthy enough, to enter the Holy of Holies on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement. The regular riff-raff, were not allowed beyond the curtain into the Holy of Holies.

The sacred space inside the curtain, the sanctuary, was called the *fanum*, and the space in front of the sanctuary was called the *pro-fanum*. From the word *pro-fanum* we get the words profane and profanity. The *fanum* described the holy. The *pro-fanum* described the

unholy, and the curtain separated the two. However, when Jesus breathes his last, it says the curtain was torn in two. With the curtain torn in two, there is no more separation between the holy and the unholy. It's all holy. God is unleashed upon all creation. No Holy of Holies, no tabernacle, is secure enough to encapsulate God. There is no more separation between the master and the servant. There is no more separation between the good thief and the bad thief. There is only one love. And that love will not stop giving itself until it is triumphant in changing the hearts of all people.

Each time we are able to say, "Father, forgive me, forgive us, for we do not know what we are doing" a little crack forms in the curtain within us. A little crack is all Jesus needs to slip through with his towel and pitcher of water. In that moment, the Holy of Holies comes to us as a Master who patiently washes our feet over and over again, until there is no need for a curtain at all.

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