

Homily for March 24, 2002  
Palm Sunday Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 50:4-7  
Philippians 2:6-11  
Matthew 26:14-27:66

## *Eternal life conquers death without abolishing it.*

The oldest piece of biblical tradition summarizing this sacred story is found in Saint Paul and dates from around the year 56 of the Christian era: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.” (1 Corinthians 15)

The first expanded, written narrative about Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection is the passion narrative of Saint Mark’s gospel: Mark 14-16. This was the faith tradition around which all the other gospel traditions were later shaped. The passion narrative of Saint Matthew which we read today is based on that of Saint Mark, and is very similar with just a few exceptions. He expands the Last Supper, the arrest of Jesus, the fate of Judas, the trial before Pilate, and the guards at the tomb.

When I was growing up I used to think that the word “passion” was applied to this part of the Gospel because of all the intense feelings portrayed throughout.

But that’s not the case, really. The gospel itself wants to make a different emphasis. In the narrative, Jesus is “passive.” He does not act; rather, he is acted upon. He does not die; he is killed. He does not rise; he is raised. On the surface level of the story the main actors are the people. But below the surface, the real actor is God. In fact, God is the only actor. Together, God and the Son of God create the saving act that makes redemption possible for all humankind.

This week, above all weeks of the year, we are asked to celebrate that eternal life conquers death without abolishing it, and that we are not asked not to weep in the face of death, but only not to despair, for the one in whom we believe is our resurrection, because he is our life. Do enter into this Holy Week, as much of it as you can. The schedule of services is in the bulletin. There is no such thing as “a failed Lent,” as if we measure our worth by what we’ve “done” by way of prayer, penance and works of kindness. There is only God’s love revealed in Jesus’ definitive conquest of death by death’s seeming conquest of him. Led to the life-giving water by those to be baptized, we in turn will, next weekend, renew our own baptismal promises and proclaim with all creation our belief in God and in God’s Son and Spirit.

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without abolishing it.**