

Sermon Palm Sunday 2010 Ron Kolanowski, St. James, Preston

If you go to the malls after Valentines Day you will see Easter eggs and bunnies in the stores. You will see lilies and flowers and signs of spring all around. And yet, almost no where will you see signs that remind you about the story we heard today. To the majority of the world, Lent doesn't exist.

The story of the suffering and death of Jesus is the foundation upon which Christianity is built. Yet we tend to focus only on the resurrection. We see people going to Church on Easter but not on Good Friday. Yet the heart of the Christian message is the suffering and death of Jesus that leads to resurrection.

The call of Lent is to go deep inside ourselves to examine places where we are vulnerable; to reflect on how our actions and thoughts have separated us from God and our neighbors; to sit in the middle of the deserts of our lives and touch our brokenness. Yet, it is absent in our culture at large. In the early days of Lent we quickly surround ourselves with colorful eggs and flowers and images of spring. Something in us cannot stand to contemplate brokenness in us and the brokenness in the world around us.

We are uncomfortable looking at our sinfulness and failings. We do whatever we can to cover or hid that part of the reality of our human condition. We do not like things broken. We do not like things messy. We don't want to see the blood. We don't want to acknowledge the pain. IT is too much for us to bear. If we look too closely at the blood and

suffering of Jesus it hits too close to home. It forces us to touch our own suffering and immanent death. And, we wonder what it will be like.

For many of us, particularly when younger we wonder will we suffer. Will we feel pain? Will our dying linger on? Will it be quick? How and when will it happen? Will God abandon us at the moment of my death? I am afraid to look at Jesus' death for what it is, because I am afraid to look at my own death.

And, yet my dear friends, it is in this very act of dying that God himself came to us, not to bring fear, not to reinforce feelings of abandonment, but rather, in the death of Jesus we are given hope. We are given the promise that in spite of what may look like the absence of God at the moment of death...God is ever and fully present in a way that is astounding. And, I believe many of you, particularly older persons understand this in a way that younger people have yet to learn.

While I was a chaplain at a retirement community, I had the privilege of being with people at the moment of their deaths. I have had people die in my arms. And every time it happened...at that moment when the person takes his or her last breath it was not painful, it was not filled with suffering or abandonment. Rather, they touch something that frees them in a way that I cannot explain in words. What I witnessed was not abandonment, but fulfillment.

There is not Happy Easter without the suffering and death of the cross. It is at that moment when Jesus cries out Eli, Eli Lama Sabachtani; it is at that moment when God feels utterly separated from his Son that all

of history comes together. IT is in that moment that God's power is most fully felt and manifested. It is in that moment that all reality as we know it is affirmed and united with a God, through his Son calls all creation to himself. And we believe that it is in that moment that we too will experience the fullness of God's love and presence for ourselves.

As we begin this Holiest of Weeks I invite us to ponder the mystery of the story we just heard....to set aside at least one half hour a day to reflect on Jesus' journey from the Garden of Gethsemane, to the trial before Pilate, to carrying the cross, and to his ultimate death. In doing so, let us ponder our own journey to Calvary...on those places where you have felt utterly abandoned. Be willing this week to empty yourself in moments of reflection and contemplation...and celebrate the cross of pain transformed into cross of triumph. Let us not be too quick to rush toward Easter...it comes only after we go through Good Friday. Jesus asks each of us this week... "Will you take the journey with me from Gethsemane to Calvary?" Amen.