

PASTORAL REFLECTION FOR PALM SUNDAY--April 17 2022

In Luke's gospel, we have come to present what happens on Palm Sunday as Jesus's high profile entry into Jerusalem beginning a day of action, initiating a well-orchestrated, strategic, non-violent campaign . . . or is it? And how then does this day come to conclusion with Jesus's arrest and conviction, held prisoner by voice vote in place of a violent criminal?

Consider that the ancient world, like ours, loved a parade, and the Roman leadership's shows of military power certainly met their expectations. Prancing horses, military hardware, rich booty from exotic lands, all designed to impress spectators and flatter the powerful. And then here comes Jesus, seated on a beast of burden, a donkey, no less, hardly acclaimed by the "A-List" and the power-elite for transport. He is accompanied not by smartly uniformed soldiers marching in impressive unison but a strangely assorted crowd of rather ragtag and rowdy hangers-on. He pauses before entering the city, literally to weep over it, overcome with grief for its coming destruction because of the blindness of its people to the ways of peace. It could have been so otherwise! Jesus's entry into Jerusalem looks more like parody than power. It reminds us of Paul's comment that God chose what is foolish in this world to shame the wise and what is weak to confound the strong. (1 Corinthians 1-27) For people who expected Jesus to appear in a royal blaze of glory -- escorted by crack military units -- palm branches, donkeys and open tears of grief must have been a bitter disappointment.

Perhaps nobody saw the contrast but God and that unsightly mob of misfits and oddballs that Jesus loved and had healed: the trembling crone who dared touch the hem of his garment; the "woman with a past" who anointed his feet with tears and perfume; the centurion (a Roman, for heaven's sake!) and his servant; Lazarus, covered in sores and licked by dogs, who had been seen begging at the gate; someone who had been known as a paralytic who was lowered through a roof on a palanquin; a woman with five husbands he had met beside a well; known lepers. Through the compassion of the man riding on the donkey, all of these followers embody power in powerlessness, wealth in poverty, strength in weakness, honor in shame.

Today we would probably find Jesus pausing in the suburbs of Kiev, as he returns there with the people of Ukraine -- stepping over bodies handcuffed and shot point blank by their Russian neighbors lying in streets where buildings have been shelled beyond recognition by parades of Russian tanks. And today, too, he would weep for blindness to the ways of peace.

Are we any more ready now for the teaching and example of this man of compassion and peace than the world was in his own time? Could THIS be his time, or would he still be arrested, convicted, and sent to his death among us?

Sister Chabanel Mathison, O.S.U.