

The Reading of the Passion

The beginning and the end of Holy Week is framed by the reading of the Passion. This year on Palm Sunday we read the Passion as rendered by Luke and on Good Friday we read the version of John. These two liturgical events stand as great book-ends holding in place our thoughts and emotions as we enter into what is the most important and significant week of the Church's calendar. During this week we must make every effort to take our place in the liturgy and participate in its celebration.

I don't think that it is possible to stand apart or aloof from the Passion. The Passion always retains and holds its capacity to draw us in as the drama unfolds. We may think that because we are so familiar with its story it can no longer shock us, but when you speak the words of the crowd, or of Pilate or Peter or whoever, you suddenly and unexpectedly become part of the drama and this has its effect. You sense the reality of what is happening. The words you speak are lifted off the page and they carry their meaning and sentiment beyond the written as they become shaped and fashioned by how we convey them. The dialogue between Peter and the servant girl becomes pulsating as you hear him denying he knows Jesus. The pathos of Jesus makes you gag with emotion as he forgives his executioners. Something more than simply listening is taking place and this is why it matters that we are present.

It matters because a different perspective is offered. We live in a society where for the majority, this week is no more holy than any other. It is to put it bluntly, just another week that will bring with it its share of ups and downs, of success and failure. The most significant thing for most people will be the fact that it's the end of the month and it's pay day. Plus, because of Easter we all get a day or two off work. So how does that make us feel? Are we going to set aside the time in our diaries for the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Thursday evening, for the commemoration of the Lord's Passion on Friday afternoon and for the celebration of the Vigil on Saturday night? What is this different perspective that is offered?

One of the major trends of our modern age has been the general drift away from "religion". The exploration of our human nature and thus our understanding of who we are as persons, is now more often than not, predicated on the premise that "I" the individual is what matters most, much more so than any sense of being bound together by a faith. Such a trend may or may not be responsible for some of the problems our society has to deal with in terms of relationship breakdown and economic hardship, but what you may ask has this got to do with the Passion? Well what you discover in the Passion is the whole gamut of human emotion laid bare and eviscerated. Something essential is stripped away from us and our humanity is the lesser for it. All those individuals who have a role to play in the nailing of Jesus to the cross, whether they be Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, the disciples, the crowd, are exposed through brutality, denial, abandonment, self preservation and mob rule to display a callous disregard for the essential goodness that is at the heart of humanity; the capacity to love.

The reading of the Passion opens our minds to that disregard, and we need to come this week and examine what that means for us, by taking our place in the landscape of the Passion.