



THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

Palm Sunday

April 13, 2003

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 15:1-39

It begins with the first healing story in the Gospel of St. Mark. There was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and the unclean spirit cries out, "What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." "Silence!" commands Jesus. Yes, silence, but not because Jesus can't abide noisy spirits. We again hear a few verses later that Jesus went throughout the whole area casting out many demons AND he would not permit the demons to speak—because they knew him. And a few verses later, Jesus heals a leper—and warns him "sternly—not to tell anyone!" And again in chapter three of Mark's gospel we hear that "whenever the unclean spirits saw him they shouted out 'You are the Son of God.'" Once more, Jesus *sternly orders them NOT TO MAKE HIM KNOWN!!* And so it goes throughout the Gospel of Mark—Jesus ordering silence concerning his identity.

What's up with that? Here's Jesus trooping all over Galilee, doing godly good works, and he doesn't want anybody to know he's the Son of God?? Why not let word get out that Jesus is the Son of God? Then maybe the stiff-necked religious right would have to shape up and listen to him. What's wrong with a good show of power? Why all the secrecy? And why is it that the demons are so intent on telling the world that Jesus is the Son of God?

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him...and they mocked him among themselves, saying "He saved others; he cannot save himself..." [The bandits] who were crucified with him also taunted him...When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock, Jesus cried out..."My God, my god, why have you forsaken me?" Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last... Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Now there is no stern order for silence. In St. Mark's Gospel, it is only here at the cross that one can look upon Jesus and declare him to be the Son of God. It is only in this scene of utter abandonment and degradation, in this scene of pain and suffering that one can look upon Jesus and see the face of God. In Mark's telling of the story it is only in beholding the naked, tortured, brutalized Jesus that one is allowed to proclaim that Jesus is the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God. By contrast, it is wrong and even demonic, to look upon the miracle-working Jesus, the healing Jesus, Jesus the great preacher and see the face of God there. Without the betrayal, without the abandonment, without the mockery, without the torture, without the scream of agony, without the death – Jesus is just another good person. And nothing more!!

It is only at the cross that we can see that Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, something to be used, but that he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient—obedient—to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Obedient—to the command to love the neighbor as we love the self. Obedient—to the command to turn the other cheek. Obedient—to the command to suffer rather than retaliate. Obedient—to the command to love

those who betray, deny, and abandon you. Obedient—to the command to forgive infinitely many times, even to forgive your murderers. Obedient to loving us—even at our very worst—even when it means that he must die at our hands.

So let this same mind be in you, says St. Paul—for this *is* who *you are* as the baptized sisters and brothers of Christ Jesus—but not ever by your own striving or works, but ever and only by the power of the Holy Spirit present for you, here in this place in Word and Sacrament, truly present, her in this place, this Holy Week and for all the days of your journey.