

## From The Pastor

The Passion of the Lord. The statement itself draws attention and evokes a wide range of emotions. Through the years I have written this Palm Sunday article many times. Each year is unique, and challenging. I am in a different place, and the life of the past year has brought me to a deeper place in my faith.

This year I have several thoughts. Perhaps something will strike you and stir your own pondering of this great act of love. I am drawn to the word passion. I love to see and read about people who live passionate lives. With Jesus, I think the word takes on two implications. As a title or event, 'The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ', refers to the three days of his trial, death, and resurrection, beginning with the Last Supper. It also refers to Jesus a man who lived a life of passionate love for others.

Passion refers to not only the traumatic abuse and suffering that Jesus went through, but more importantly the love with which he accepted it. Many in Jesus' day were subject to this kind of cruel torture and death. No one did it with the same purpose and intent as Jesus. For Jesus, this was a perfect act of love and self-giving. Jesus chose to give his love for the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with the Father. Such truths can only be left for your pondering. Each of us must take in the mystery and perceive its truth in the depth of being.

Without love, this act of suffering and death makes no sense. With love and for love, it makes all the sense in the world. To meaningfully ponder the mystery in this truth, one must know who Jesus is and what the intention of his mission was. We believe Jesus was fully God. We believe Jesus was also fully human. This is a great tension for us. We tend to accept the divinity of Jesus and resist his humanity. Because of our narrow human perception, this dualism tends to be too much. If Jesus is fully human, how can he also be fully divine? This is the gift of the Incarnation. God humbled himself to share our human state so that we may come to share the divine state.

Maybe this is the point of resistance. Perhaps we resist the possibility of becoming divine. This is the point, and the necessity of the redemption of the Cross that only Jesus could accomplish. We do not become divine in that we become God; we become divine through the redemption of the Cross so we can grow to our full humanity in Christ. The glory of God is the human person fully alive. Jesus is that person. Jesus is the fullness of what it means to be human and the model of what our lives could be. We cannot be Jesus, but we can become fully ourselves in love and self-giving in the context and circumstance of our lives as they are. In doing so, the divine life in us through baptism will be revealed through our humanity; the way we live in love. We do not reveal light and love by ourselves; it is the divine light and love that is within us.

Our growth and maturing in the spiritual life is only credible if it is reflected in our becoming more fully human. What does this mean? It means that we must translate our religious devotions and spiritual practices into real virtue in our daily lives. It is quite possible that a person could be very devout and spiritually informed, but not maturely human. Remember the story Father Marchionda told about the woman who missed choir practice because she committed herself to hours of Eucharistic Adoration? When the show time came, she insisted on being in the front row, becoming belligerent and insulting because she was placed in a back row. She was devout, and 'spiritual', but not very human. We love God only to the extent that we love one another. The one who learns the true life of the Spirit is the one who learns to humble them self in love for others.

This is what Jesus did in the Passion. In the person of Jesus, the fullness of divine love revealed the fullness of human love. Jesus died as a human being, in a human body, with all the human emotions you or I would have. He also died with the fullness of divine love in his mind and heart. The fullness of divine love is completely self-emptying, and came through the body/person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Traumatic and physically painful as the death of Jesus was, it is clear that Jesus was peaceful and in control of himself. Why? Because he is most himself when he is giving himself for others. Did Jesus enjoy the Cross? No. Did he willingly accept the Cross in love for our sake? Yes he did, because he knew that his love would free us from sin and death, teaching us to be more fully human.

My father is currently going through the dying process. Does he like it? No, but he is doing it with faith and courage, and some degree of humor. Do we like it? No, but we are honoring him by walking and staying with him during these essential days of his life and ours. In his suffering, somehow he is becoming more himself in love. By our attention to him in love, we are becoming more fully human, more loving as we were made to be. It is not pleasant mostly, but it is real and it is true. It is a passion; a love and suffering that is making us more human. We would not have it another way. Neither would Jesus. Jesus not only endured the Cross, he embraced it. Jesus was fully himself on that Cross, human and divine, revealing the truth of who he is and who we are called to be.

Please come to the Triduum Services and honor the Lord Jesus. Awaken to his spirit within you and learn to be more fully human.

Father John Esper