

HOLY WEEK: DAYS OF AWE

As Palm Sunday's festival gold fades to the deep purple (in some places, to black!) liturgical color of Holy Week, we are reminded of the fickleness of human nature. Many of the same voices that shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" would shout, "Crucify Him!" just a few days later.

Why?

The answer is simple enough; Jesus failed to meet the expectations of the mob. He was not a king of the type of David. In other words, he was not a political Messiah. He did not come to remove the hated Roman occupiers. And for those who wanted a political savior the disappointment was so extreme that they were willing to see Him hung on a Roman cross (a perverse and ironic sort of revenge if there ever was one!).

For those who were looking for a religious savior along the lines of Moses or Elijah, Jesus was an even greater shock. Unlike the great prophets, He dared to claim to be the Son of God, Himself--Divinity Incarnate (to say, "before Abraham was I AM", was to utter the very words that Moses heard from the burning bush). This could only be blasphemy and blasphemers deserved to die. Again, the irony that it should be at the hands of foreigners--but hadn't He made Himself an outcast by making such outrageous claims?

And what of the Romans? Pontius Pilate was a vicious man who hated the Jews and the Samaritans of Palestine with something approaching a passion. The opportunity to squeeze the chief priests into a situation where they had to beg his

help to be rid of a troublesome prophet who was also a seditious rabble rouser from the perspective of the Imperial authorities was just too good to be true. No man could claim to be a king without Caesar's approval--but to be able to attach the notice: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew above the condemned man's head-- what a unique gift! How rare a chance to humiliate the Jewish leaders while currying favor with his own superiors! Thus, the conspiracy unfolds, while behind and beneath them all, the age old enemy of the human race plots and maneuvers. Satan cares neither for Rome nor for the warring Pharisees and Sadducees; to the powers of hell they are all pawns in the ancient battle against God's Kingdom.

Yet they are all--the local Judean authorities, Pilate, and the ancient Adversary--blinded by appearances. They are tricked by what they can see and are deceived by what they cannot perceive. They rightly see the frail and mortal nature of a man and judge that they will be able to 'solve the problem' of His inconvenient message by killing Him. After all, this has proven to be a remarkably effective method in the past.

It will prove to be a disastrous mistake in this particular case. For beneath, within, concealed by the very real human nature of this mortal man truly is the Divine Person of the Immortal Son of God, the Word of the Father, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Of course, they cannot know it. Of course, they do not believe even when He speaks plainly. Even when He tells them the truth. How can they believe? They are, by nature cynics and doubters--professional politicians. And as for truth, how

can those who live by lies recognize the truth when He looks them straight in the eyes?

These are the Days of Awe. And the encounters between Jesus and the crowds, between Jesus and the Judean authorities, between Jesus and Judas, between Jesus and Pilate, and finally between Christ the Almighty Conqueror and Satan in hell are also encounters which involve us.

It is important in these days not to look on the events as stories from two millennia ago, but as events which remain ever new since they involve human emotions, human motivations, human desires both for good and ill which are timeless. WE WERE THERE. WE ARE THERE IN THAT CROWD--SOMETIMES WEeping AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS AND SOMETIMES SCREAMING "CRUCIFY HIM!"

How is this possible?

Quite simple. It's all a matter of the disposition of the heart: What sort of Messiah are we looking for? What sort of King? What sort of Kingdom? One of this world who will fulfill our own selfish agenda, or another kind of Kingdom which is too big to fit into anyone's agenda--so big, so great, that it will burst hell and death itself and topple hatred and fear by the power of Life and Grace and Love!

Make it your business to be in Church during the coming days of Great and Holy Week. Check out the Service Times and enter into the Days of Awe.