April 14, 2019 | Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord (C)


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The account of the passion of Jesus is a story of violence and abuse. These themes run through the readings assigned to Palm Sunday. Isaiah tells of beating, buffeting, and spitting. The psalm response reports of piercing hands and feet. Paul has this same torture in mind when he refers to death on a cross. This same brutality is found in the gospel account of the passion. We are appalled by such viciousness. Two questions immediately come to mind: What did these people do wrong to deserve such treatment? Why didn’t they fight back?

The Isaian passage and the psalm response probably referred to an Israelite of the author’s own time. However, when the readings are part of the Liturgy of the Word, they provide color to the portrait of the suffering Jesus sketched by the New Testament readings. O, what did he do wrong? Nothing; he was an innocent sufferer. Why didn’t he fight back with violence? Because he was a nonviolent sufferer who was shining light on the dignity of all people and transforming the world through this action.

Holy Week calls us to reflect on the suffering of Jesus. As we move deeper into this reflection, we must grapple with the realization that Jesus continues to suffer. The Body of Christ continues to endure violence and abuse; to be beaten, buffeted, and spit upon; to be pierced hands and feet. And what are we doing about it? Has our piety only led us to step back into history in our reflection on the passion? Or do we step forward in order to comfort those who make up the Body of Christ today, to assuage their suffering and transform our world?

How does the passion of Jesus really touch us?