

PASSION / PALM SUNDAY

We gather to remember the passion of Jesus, to enter its mystery. We gather to hold holy the love that opposed violence and the love that endured violence, the love that made its way with a cross on its back. We gather to profess our gratitude for that love and to stand in solidarity with all those people whose courageous love makes them victims of violence.

The cross of Jesus has not been dismantled, the suffering he experienced has not ceased. The cross stands in the midst of life – not as ritual decoration, but as a reminder that this is the price the world exacts from those who confront its ways with the values of the Gospel.

Could Jesus have avoided the cross ? Could he have made a detour around Calvary and continued on his way ? Could he not have evaded assassination and settled for a quiet existence in his own region of Galilee? Did his forgiving love require the cross ?

It was not Jesus who looked for the cross. It was the world that looked to the cross as the way to eliminate him. The cross was not the idea of the Father; it was the final solution thought up by a world opposed to Jesus' way. God the Father is not a sadist who planned the destruction of his beloved Son.

Love does not demand the cross, but in the life of Jesus love ends up on the cross. *That is what actually happened.* That is what continues to happen to so many who choose unconditional love. Love chooses not to avoid the suffering that emerges from that choice.

Jesus could have avoided going to Jerusalem; he could have taken the advice of the disciples who warned him about the fate that would surely befall him there. But instead of avoiding Jerusalem, Jesus enters it publicly and loudly. He does not disguise himself and slip in through a quiet gate; he heads a parade.

He decides to confront the power that is set against him..... the power that placed strict adherence to the law above the love of God; the power that imposed heavy burdens on the poor and vulnerable and did nothing to help them; the power that saw religion as ritual with complete disregard for matters of justice and peace. Jesus could only have removed himself from suffering by keeping himself untouched by other

people's pain, by making himself invulnerable, by removing himself from human relationships.

But that was not why he had come. He had not come to be a mobile monument in stone; he was God's love in fragile human flesh and bone. He was God's passion, God's overwhelming love, God's risky adventure.

Today we recall the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and we hear again the story of the passion. But why should we remember the passion of Jesus? Why keep alive the memory of such anguish and pain? Aren't we supposed to forget about past pain and hurts, and let them disappear if they can?

As Christians we are committed to be a people who remembers the passion of Jesus. "Whenever you do this, do it in memory of me." When a community chooses to remember suffering, their memory becomes a protest. Remembrance of pain demands a future that is more than a repetition of the past. That is why the memory of the past is so important: in recalling the suffering of the victim there is a protest that this should not be repeated again. There should be no innocent victims.

That memory also serves to make us aware of the crosses that are in our midst. The memory of Jesus' passion educates us to pay attention to the suffering of others. The cross demands that attention should be paid. So today we pay attention to the suffering of Jesus and to the suffering of all who are victims of hate and violence.