

THE WHAT AND WHY OF OBSERVING OUR LORD'S SUFFERINGS

Palm Sunday is the first day of a week that will end the following Saturday. Some call it *Holy Week*; some call it *Passion Week*. Some choose not to observe it and so call it nothing at all.

For us it is an opportunity to walk with our Lord through his sufferings by which he won our salvation. While we should always remember our Lord's death, and while he has given us a sacrament to observe frequently in order to remember his death, we find it a good thing to spend a week thinking and meditating on these things before we break out into the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Palm Sunday. We remember our Lord riding into Jerusalem as his disciples, and many pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Passover season, acclaimed him as King. He orchestrated all this because he was now ready to be acknowledged as the Messianic King coming to deliver his people from their bondage. But he is not the King they thought Messiah would be (which explains why the multitudes were so fickle). He comes riding a donkey on a mission of peace. He will make peace for his people by submitting to the wrath of man, the devil, and God, and thereby delivering his people from sin, guilt, shame, death, and hell. This is a day of celebration but the shadow of the cross is cast across it. **(Matt. 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19).**

Monday - Wednesday. These days have no special designations, but they are an occasion for us to recall his goings and comings into Jerusalem, his conflicts with the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, his parables and warnings, and the coming of the Greeks, a signal that his death is very soon and that he will die to deliver not only Jews but people of every nation and condition. Through his death, which looks like his humiliation and defeat, he will be lifted up to draw a multitude out of the whole world to himself and his salvation. **(Matt. 21:10-26:19; Mark 11:12-14:16; Luke 19:45-22:13; John 12:20-50)**

Maundy Thursday. We, in a sense, join Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room where he washes their feet and transforms the Passover Meal into the Lord's Supper. We witness his humble service for the sake of cleansing his disciples, and that he calls us all to follow him in humility and service to one another. We also hear his words, "This is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." (As to "Maundy" some think it comes from a Latin word which has to do with washing, calling to mind his washing of his disciples' feet and the example it sets for us to follow in our relations with one another. Others think it comes from a Latin word that means *commandment*, calling to mind the new command to love one another as he loves us. Those two themes are intimately tied to one another.) **(Matt. 26:17-56; Mark 14:17-52; Luke 22:14-53; John 13:1-18:12)**

Good Friday. On Good Friday, we do not let ourselves join the rush to Easter, but we go to Golgotha where he is crucified in our place and for our benefit. We do not thoughtlessly pass him by, or selfishly try not to think about the unique depth of his sufferings of body and soul on the cross. We see him in hell for us, and we know the horror of it, the penal sacrifice of it, the love of it for us. We will observe this day by gathering together to hear the account of his sufferings from Isaiah 53, culminating in his crucifixion, and by using hymns and Psalms to meditate on and respond to what we read. ("Good" Friday probably originally was "God's" Friday.) **(Matt. 26:57-27:66; Mark 14:53-15:47; Luke 22:54-23:56; John 18:13-19:42)**

Saturday. On Saturday we remember from the Gospel that he was "crucified, died, and was buried." On the third day his body raised, his soul and body reunited in the glorified state.

He has experienced dying, being buried, and remaining for a time in the condition of the dead. He is the first fruits and pattern of us. He died, as we will, his spirit went to the Father as ours will, he was buried as we will be, and he remained in that imperfect state of bodiless existence as we will until he raises us, as he was on the third day. It is a somber yet comforting day, for he has sanctified even the grave and assured us that our bodies in their graves remain united to him until he comes and we share in the wholeness and glory of his resurrected humanity, body and soul, without sin, untouched by mortality, and restored to perfect harmony in his image.

Just as we should not rush to Christmas but let it come to us, so we should not rush to Easter, but let it come to us as a day of unmixed joy after we have followed our Lord through all his sufferings for us.