

March 28, 2010 - The Rt. Rev. Robert C. Johnson, Jr. [PDF] (Isaiah 50:49-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:39-23:56)

Today is one day that when we go home from church, we need to know that we have been to church. Not to a meeting - to a church. Not to a coffee or a tea - to a church. Not to a lecture or to a concert - to a church. A place where truth is taken seriously, and not just a textbook truth either. A truth that means something, if anything means anything. For instance, when my time comes to die or when your turn gets close to die, or when the doctor says, "You have cancer," or "I'm sorry, but your baby is brain damaged," or "There's been an accident. Please come quickly," or this one, "I don't love you anymore. I've found someone else." A hurtful deliverance of news. The truth that means anything. When the time comes to look back at the crusades and the holocausts and the wars and the droughts and famines that litters the history of our world and decide whether it's better to go on with God or to go on alone. The truth that means something if anything means something.

Church - the place where truth may not always be agreed upon, but where the search for it is understood and appreciated and insisted on. Church - one place where Jacques Ellul's description of sin is proven wrong. He said, "Human beings can never stand reality. They spend their time lying to themselves, covering up the realities, providing themselves with illusions and rationalizations." Today is one day that when go home from church, we need to know we've been to church. We've looked over the edge to try to see what's over there. We have acknowledged reality. We have thrown off our cover ups. We have surrendered our illusions and rationalizations. We have said, "This is life the way it really is." Not the way television commercials show it, not the way we pretend it, but the way it really is.

What does it mean? When we get to those questions about meaning and truth, we know we have been to church. The Sunday of the Passion is the Sunday for meaning and truth. If there's no meaning in today, there is no meaning in any day, not even next Sunday. If there's no Christian truth today, there's no Christian truth any day. If there's no power in today, there is no power in any day. If God is not doing something new and unique in the Passion, then there is nothing new or unique in Easter. If God was not doing something never before as powerful in the cross of Christ, then there won't be anything worth up for next Sunday. If the Passion of Christ is just one death of many, that is the only truth there is, then we may well give Easter back to the Druids or give it completely back to the giant rabbit that lays colored eggs.

Part of the irony of Christianity, part of the foolishness of the cross that St. Paul talks about is that the world has made a colossal mistake about life. The mistake is that suffering is a denial of life. A denial of God's goodness. Wrong. Wrong, wrong. The Christian Messiah, the Son of God, suffers and dies. That's not a mistake. That's not an exception to the rule. Christ is the rule. That suffering and dying is not contrary to the will of the God, but at the very center of the love of God. The good life is not what we have always thought. At least not the good life on this earth. Life in heaven is in God's hands. God can make of it what God wants. But life here, the good life here, is the way of the cross.

The prayer we pray in the Palm Sunday procession tells the truth. "Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find none other than the way of life and peace." For those who can accept and believe the Gospel, the Passion of Christ is power. Contemplating Christ's suffering and death gives power to a believer that nothing else gives. The power to receive the love of God and power to walk the way of the cross with Christ hand in hand on behalf of the whole world. Amen.