



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: "Walking in the Way"
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament Isaiah 45:21-25
Epistle Philippians 2:5-11
Gospel Matthew 26:36-27:54

The rites of Holy Week help us to relive the Passion of Christ and to pass on our Christian tradition.

It is said that the traditional rites of Holy Week go back to the very early days of the Church when Christians had only just rediscovered some of the actual locations in Jerusalem mentioned in the Gospel accounts. The city of Jerusalem has been totally destroyed by the Romans and it was only with a lot of research, and some wishful thinking, that the sites of the Gospel events were recovered in the Holy City. Those who were there as pilgrims, or just tourists, wanted to walk in the footsteps of the Master, and so observances like the Palm Sunday procession or the Stations of the Cross came to be an integral part of a visit to the Holy Land during Holy Week.

But for most of our Western Christian tradition, the observances of Holy Week were a medieval thing- the result of European '*balikbayans*' or returnees from trade and crusade who brought with them the concept of reliving the events of Christ's life in church. Soon, in one form or another, all churches were doing it: devising ceremonies and writing hymns to enable even those who never left home the opportunity to 'walk with Christ' in their imagination while reenacting some of the most important episodes they had only listened to in Bible readings up until then.

This medieval tradition lives on in conservative Christian societies even today, and many who are new to the Philippines will be impressed by the processions, the vigils, or the interesting very old custom of the singing of what is called the '*pasyon*' in local communities in this country even in this 21st century.

What we have done here this morning is a small taste of this timeless practice. We too have relived the procession into Jerusalem with branches of palm, even as we will relive the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, and kneel before the Cross on Good Friday before the baptisms of Saturday night and Sunday morning allow us to make "up close and personal" the New Life of Christ given through the mystery of Easter.

But there is more to these rites and rituals than theater or performance. It is not something that is "watched," but rather something that is lived. This makes worship not only a way to praise God, but also a way of training the body and the soul to become part of what Christ had done for the world and to make it personal in a very thorough, very human way.

The authors of the book that is the basis for our Lenten study this year, a work entitled *Resident Aliens*, make an important point in their chapter about the role of the church in educating and training new Christians. They are speaking about ethics here:

"Learning to be moral is much like learning to speak a language. You do not teach someone a language...by first teaching that person rules of grammar. The way most of us learn to speak a language is by listening to others speak and then imitating them. ... You learn to speak by being initiated into a community of language, by observing your elders, by imitating them. The rules of grammar come later, if at all. ... So the church can do nothing more 'ethical' than to expose us to significant examples of Christian living." (*Resident Aliens*, p. 97)

What the authors say about ethical behavior is true also of virtually all the other aspects of our common life as a church: our worship, our teaching, and our

community involvement. We learn by doing, even in as seemingly distant a thing as our Christian history and our reliving the life of Christ during Holy Week. We live out our faith in a special way by performing these rites, enacting this “sacred drama” in which we all have a part to play. We do this not only for our children, but also for all of us who need these physical actions and reenactments in order to save us from having our religion be a matter of our minds alone, and not also of all of the rest of what makes us human beings.

The rites of Holy Week began with prayers that set this expectation: “Assist us mercifully with your help, O Lord God of our salvation, that we may enter with joy upon the contemplation of those mighty acts, whereby you have given us life and immortality. [] Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace.” May this week, however much any of us are willing or able to take part, help us to live out more personally the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that by example we may come to be able to “speak Christian” more fluently.