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April 2, 2006: 5th Sunday of Lent  
Our Lady Queen of Peace

## Introduction

It has become commonplace in recent years to compare the way we in the so-called developed nations celebrate Holy Week and Easter and how it's done in poorer areas of the world. In the developing world people put great emphasis on Holy Week, especially Good Friday. They identify with a God who has suffered, given the fact that most of their lives are lived in poverty and oppression. In fact they often conclude their commemoration of Holy Week with Good Friday. Easter is not much in their range of experience.

On the other hand we in the world of privilege tend to skip over much of Holy Week and even begin to wish each other "Happy Easter" shortly after Palm Sunday. We have a knowledge of Easter, but perhaps not so much of Holy Thursday and especially of Good Friday.

This analogy is not exact, of course, but in general terms it tends to illustrate two points: that the poor of the world need an experience of Hope – the Hope which Easter represents; and that we need to concentrate more on the suffering and death of Jesus as integral to His Paschal Mystery.

Today's readings, one week before Holy Week help us in this world to do just that. In the first reading the Prophet Jeremiah speaks of the New Covenant, the new contract, the new agreement which God will establish between God's own Self and humanity. It's a Covenant in which God assures humanity of final salvation. This comes at a crucial time for the people to whom Jeremiah is speaking. God's Chosen People are in exile, their nation swept away, their temple destroyed. So Jeremiah, who had warned the Israelites of these dire consequences, now speaks a word of hope in God's name.

The second reading from St. Paul reminds us of the price Jesus had to pay in order to achieve for us this final salvation: "He learned obedience through his suffering".

And the Gospel gives us a sobering reminder of our part in this New Covenant: "Whoever would be my servant must follow me so that where I am my servant will also be."

We're called, therefore, to reflect on the consequences of following Jesus and of being where He is – particularly in terms of adversity and conflict. We come to understand that the experience of adversity can bring new beginnings:

-that we cannot, nor should we try to shield our youth from adversity, because experience has taught us that such difficulties can make our young people strong and productive.

-that even catastrophic adversity, such as that experienced some months ago in the southern part of our country, can bring a new beginning (although, our county/government has not done very well in that respect)

-that the many problems and difficulties which we bring and share with this communal, Eucharistic celebration each week can strengthen and unite our faith community.

We have other examples of adversity, which have brought with them incalculable benefits - new life and resurrection. The great German Lutheran pastor, Deitrich von Bonhoeffer, confronted the harsh and unjust regime of his country and was crushed by it. Now he stands as a model of faithfulness, renown across the world. The sister of one of our own parishioners, Sister Dorothy Stang, confronted the oppressors in Brazil who were seizing land from peasants and destroying the ecological balance there. Almost exactly a year ago she also paid with her life for that stand. And Archbishop Oscar Romero stood over against the power structure of his country – begged an American president not to send more arms to his country – and was deemed too much of a threat to the status quo. Thus, he was shot at the altar while saying Mass just twenty-six years ago and now stands as the “Saint of the Americas,” risen, as he predicted in his Salvadoran people and indeed in all of us.

Let me mention one last person who is PROVOKING adversity, rather than just going along and remaining silent. Ray McGovern, whom you have doubtless heard on NPR or on television, spent 27 years as an intelligence analyst for the CIA. Now he is totally disillusioned with the misuse of intelligence on the part of our political leaders. Ray is crisscrossing the U.S., like a modern Jeremiah, warning of a new danger: our government’s intentions regarding Iran. This very low-key analyst believes that the United States will attack Iran in three months – with or without Israel – and that given Iran’s quite potent, conventional military strength, our attack will set off a reaction there and across the Middle East which will be devastating. McGovern also envisions the use of nuclear weapons on our part, especially when Iran shows itself totally capable of defending its sovereignty. Armageddon is a word that comes to mind in this scenario – unless, as McGovern says, we speak out.

## Conclusion

At the outset of this homily I mentioned that our task now is to live Holy Week to its fullest. I must say now that engaging seriously in Holy Week carries a price tag. We can expect no “cheap grace” on this one. To be where Jesus would be in our time and in this place has enormous consequences for us. But we can do no less, we who are incorporated – baptized – into the dying and the rising of the Lord.

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