

Palm Sunday Homily
April 5, 2009

Introduction

Why the Cross? has become an increasingly common question among thinking Christian-Catholics these days. In planning today's liturgy, in fact, we dealt extensively with this very question.

Let me, then, make a few statements which may help all of us with what is essentially a mystery - the Mystery of Redemption. Many of these observations are drawn from Latin American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, S.J.

1st Observation: the religious establishment in Jesus' time (Scribes, Pharisees, Elders, Chief Priests) held the conviction that God stood for the established order. In other words, their religious-social structure was of God.

2nd Observation: Jesus could not have been the Incarnate Presence of God at a particular historical moment and place without challenging that idolatry.

3rd Observation: Jesus' accusation against those in power is that they were manipulating the true God in the name of a false deity; and that manipulation took the concrete form of power and its use.

4th Observation: Jesus, therefore, necessarily introduced conflict into his life. This reality was exemplified in the Gospel we heard last Sunday where Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. The end of that Gospel, although not included for some strange reason in the lectionary, demonstrates the intense conflict which was so much a part of Jesus' life and ministry. You will remember that last week's Gospel reading ended with these words: "Many of the Jews who had gone out to be with Mary saw what Jesus did and began to believe in Him". The part we did not hear follows immediately on those words: "but others went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the council. 'What are we to do', they asked. 'If we allow him to continue everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away our temple and our nation'. Then Caiphas who was High Priest that year said: 'you do not understand anything. You do not know that it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish'... And from that day they were determined to kill Jesus".

A calculated political decision resulting from the threat which Jesus represented to the blasphemous status quo of that time.

Conclusion:

In human terms, then, the Cross is the outcome of Jesus' historical path. When we speak of Jesus' dying for our sins, I believe that to be true, not so much in terms of our personal faults and failings, but in terms of the monstrous sins of his era and of every era.