

Palm Sunday – Year A
(Mar. 20, 2005)

Once more we have listened to the story of the passion and death of Jesus. Many thoughts perhaps crowd our minds at a time like this. Let me suggest one simple idea on this Palm Sunday: God suffers with us.

Even the Hebrew Scriptures would agree with the idea that God knows our suffering. How could he not, being God? But what our own Christian belief adds to that is the simple fact that God, the very God who made us, became one of us took on our flesh and blood and bones; ate and drank as we do, laughed and cried. He spoke, he slept, he touched, he healed. And like all of us he suffered. And as will inevitably happen to all of us he died.

So it is not only because God is all powerful and all knowing that God understands our suffering. It is also – and perhaps, most importantly – that God has personally experienced our suffering. In Jesus God has had a most vivid and profound experience of what it means to be weak like the weakest of us. He knows what it is like to be snubbed by people from his own town, to be insulted by local authorities, to have one of his closest friends swear that he does not know him, to have someone he loves kiss him as a signal of betrayal.

Suffering, dear friends, like death, is inevitable. When it comes we have a choice. We can enter into ourselves and suffer alone. But such suffering shrinks us, diminishes us. Or we can open ourselves to others. Indeed as a Christian, as a member of Christ's own Body, I dare not insist on suffering alone. Suffering is my share in the Passion of Christ: I suffer with him. Remember the morning offering we were taught as children? It's still appropriate. I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day. United with Christ's Passion, my passion can touch my sisters and brothers with redeeming grace, can lend them the courage of Christ, the peace of Christ, yes, even the joy of Christ. I suffer with them and they with me.

Dear friends, this is our choice as we enter this Holy Week. It's our week, too. It's our journey to Calvary along with Jesus. The question is how will we go, alone with our pain, or in the company of others, clutching

our cross to ourselves or arms outstretched like his, opening ourselves to our crucified brothers and sisters.