

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION "B"  
MARCH 28/29, 2015

In the account of Jesus' passion which we have just heard, the evangelist Mark includes a detail, unique to his gospel account, we may have missed.

St. Mark tells us that at the moment of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, as the delegation from the high priests council led Jesus off, and Jesus' disciples fled away, there was: "***A young man following him wearing nothing but a linen cloth*** (some translations state 'white cloth') ***about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked***" (Mk. 14:51,52).

Who is this young man? And why did Mark include him? Some commentators posit that he is Mark himself. Others that he is an early convert to Christianity. Still others that he is an "everyman" figure of all of us. Why the detail of the "linen" or "white" cloth? Again, commentators posit it likely represents the white robe of baptism. Why is he running off? Commentators speculate that, realizing the full import of what following Jesus leads to—the cross—that out of fear he runs away from faith, from the community (the church), abandons Jesus.

How much is each of us like this disciple? When has each of us left the dignity and identification of our baptismal following of Jesus behind and run away from him in the face of fear, peer or societal pressure to conformity, or in the face of suffering and death tried to turn away from it in the hope of escaping, of having to confront and pass through it? Holy Week brings us face-to-face with these questions.

A week later, early on Easter Sunday morning we meet a young man again. The holy women come to Jesus' tomb, and, finding it empty go inside and, the evangelist Mark states see: "***a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe***" who says to them:

*“Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you’”* (Mk. 16:5-7).

Who is *this* young man? Again, St. Mark does not tell us. Is it Jesus himself? Is it an angel? Is it the young man of Gethsemane come back to faith and now turned apostle? I choose this last possibility. I like to think that after his initial turning away the young man had second thoughts, repented of his sin, followed Jesus to Calvary, heard Jesus’ words from the cross **“Father, forgive them”**; his words to the dying repent Dismas the “good thief” **“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise”** also addressed to him. No matter how great his sin, his betrayal, Jesus still loved him, forgave him, took him back, extended to him the fullness of divine mercy. Given this gift of grace, the young man, renewed in the strength and courage of the Spirit, once again reaffirmed his faith and following of Jesus, took up his baptismal robe, once again had the courage to take up his cross, once again set out on the road to discipleship and membership in the church. And now, on Easter Sunday he has become an apostle, a witness, an evangelist of the good news of eternal life and divine forgiveness in Jesus. This same hope, this same forgiveness, this same invitation to renewed faith and following of Jesus, this same resurrected life is ours once again for the taking this Holy Week as we journey with Jesus through the liturgy of these days, especially Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and night Vigil of Easter on Saturday evening.

I pray for each of us a blessed Holy Week.