

HOMILY PASSION/PALM SUNDAY YEAR A

“The Cross-Shaped God”

(Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66)

“The American people have a right to comfort, power and speed.” These words were spoken by some Congressional leaders in the United States to justify giving permission to drill for oil in the protected Alaska wildlife area.

The way to new life is not power and wealth, but the way of Jesus – the power of powerlessness

I believe that resolution to invade an ecologically sensitive area was voted down by the Republican congress. For once greater efficiency and the values of comfort, power and speed did not triumph over concern for Mother Nature.

The temptation to succumb to the lure of those powerful forces, however, face us and our society everyday as life-choices that we are tempted to make and live by. They are the same temptations that Jesus faced in the desert: possessions, prestige and power. Most people are falling for these as a way of life – especially power.

People want more possessions, so there is greed and corruption all around us. They want more prestige, so there is gossip, jealousy and character assassination. They want more power, so there is control, violence and abuse of all kinds, even sexual abuse. Air India bombings; suicide bombs in Iraq; ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, war in Darfur, conflict in Palestine – this is the way of the world.

From the beginning of his ministry, when he said “no” to these temptations in the wilderness, Jesus embodied a new way. Throughout his ministry of loving service, Jesus used a new kind of power. His was the power of “exousia”, the power of a child which in the end is the greatest power of all. His is the way of love, of compassion, of powerlessness. He was faithful to that mission, a mission that took him to the cross. There we see the power of powerlessness.

Jesus gave up all his power and control, and became totally vulnerable – to show how God works in this world, and that this is the greatest power of all. It is this way that God chose to draw all people to himself. It is this kind of power that he wants us to live by and adopt as our own. That takes a lot of faith – faith in Jesus and his way.

Edward Cheemakeese from Chitek Lake is a First Nations elder whose son was murdered by a drug gang. He shared with a group at a rehab centre closing ceremony how he was able to forgive those who killed his son by reading the Passion accounts.

The liturgy of Palm/Passion Sunday celebrates this kind of love. The celebration starts out with the crowds welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem as a king and liberator, hoping that he would be the one to free them from the oppressive Roman domination. The fact that

Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem humbly, riding on a donkey, suggesting that he was a different kind of king, was lost on the crowd.

When they realized that his way was not the way of the world, the only way they knew how to live, they turned on him and began to attack him – and the liturgy reflects that dramatic turn-around with the reading of the Passion. We are invited to put our faith in his way, the way that leads to the new life of Easter.

Ken Usyinski, who developed and directs the Face To Face youth retreats, shares how when he was younger he was totally caught up and trapped in a desperate need to succeed. As he became more aware of God's unconditional love for him in Jesus Christ, he was able to let go of the negative force within him that was controlling him, and experience greater freedom, peace and joy in his life.

In the Eucharist that we celebrate now, the power of powerlessness, the power of God's unconditional love shown for us on the cross, is made present to us in the simple gifts of Word, Bread and Wine. We are invited to believe in that kind of love, and given a mission to live it out in our lives, as Jesus did.

So remember, the way to new life is not through possessions, prestige nor power. No, the way to new life is the way of Jesus – the power of powerlessness, the way of unconditional love. May God bless us all with this new way of living.