

PALM SUNDAY *Mark 11:1-10 (Extract)*

The soldiers led Jesus out to crucify him. They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it.

Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get.

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: "The King of the Jews". And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The passers-by jeered at him: they shook their heads and said, "Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!"

The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way: "He saved others," they said "he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, for us to see it and believe." Even those who were crucified with him taunted him.

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, "Listen, he is calling on Elijah." Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink saying, "Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down."

But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, "In truth this man was a son of God."

There were some women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome. These used to follow him and look after him when he was in Galilee. And there were many other women there who had come up to Jerusalem with him.

Gospel Commentary : Mark writes for the communities of the 70's. Many of these communities, whether in Italy or Syria, were going through their own passion. They were faced with the cross in many ways. They had been persecuted at the time of Nero in the 60's and many had died devoured by wild beasts. Others had betrayed, denied or abandoned their faith in Jesus, like Peter, Judas and other disciples. Others asked themselves: "Can I bear persecution?" Others were tired after persevering through many trials without any

results. Among those who had abandoned their faith, some asked themselves whether it was possible to rejoin the community. They wanted to start their journey again, but did not know if it was possible to rejoin. For them, as for us, the answer is in chapters 14 to 16 of Mark's Gospel, which describe the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the time of the greatest defeat of the disciples and, in an hidden way, their greatest hope. Let us look into the mirror of these chapters to see how the disciples reacted to the Cross and how Jesus reacts to the infidelity and weaknesses of the disciples. Let us try to discover how Mark encourages the faith of the community and how he describes the one who is truly a disciple of Jesus. The account of the passion in Mark is very stark. Jesus is portrayed as alone, abandoned by his closest friends and perhaps even by God. He dies on the cross with a loud cry on his lips and darkness covers the whole earth. Yet at this precise moment the Roman centurion who was guarding him, having seen how he died, makes the great confession of faith: 'Truly this man was God's Son.' Throughout his ministry Jesus had tried to teach his followers that the way of the kingdom was the way of self emptying love. They had to become servants, slaves to one another and forget about greatness as the world understands it. Repeatedly they failed to understand him and eventually they ran away. So we are left with this foreign outsider to tell us the meaning of Calvary. Through his faithfulness to the kingdom Jesus finally tears away the veil that separates God and suffering humanity. By his prayer of abandonment Jesus has shown us that, far from abandoning us, God has identified totally with our struggle.

Reflection

Suffering is part and parcel of being human and, while we must readily acknowledge this fact, it is also true that we usually do all in our power to avoid it. Our Saviour may be seen in these texts as a model of patient endurance and of faithfulness. We are not asked to believe that suffering is good in itself but to see that good can come of it and to recognise in Jesus God's solidarity with all those who endure suffering for doing what is right.

