

PASSIONTIME



The two weeks between Passion Sunday and Easter Sunday re-enact the culmination of Christ's self-immolation for the salvation of Man. Passion Week commemorates in its Sacred Liturgy the last year of Our Lord's earthly life; Holy Week reviews the final few days.

From earliest times the final sufferings of our Lord were conceived as one inseparable whole and referred to as the PASSION. St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles speaks of those to whom Christ "showed Himself alive after his PASSION." Likewise, from earliest times the faithful have honored the memory of the Passion with loving devotion. A celebrated document of the visit made to Jerusalem by Sylvia, a pilgrim from Galicia, toward the end of the Fourth Century, relates the deep feelings of the faithful during the celebration of Holy Week in Jerusalem. Typical is the commemoration of the Three Hours of Agony on Good Friday.

"At the several Readings and Prayers," reads Sylvia's account, "there is such emotion displayed, and lamentation of all the people, as is wonderful to hear. For there is no one, great or small, who does not weep on that day, during those Three Hours, in a way which cannot be imagined, THAT THE LORD SHOULD HAVE SUFFERED SUCH THINGS FOR US!"

This is the key thought of PASSIONTIME: "That the Lord should have suffered such things for us." The God-Man, bound by the ties of humanity to us, took upon Himself the GUILT of all the members of the great Human Family. "For our sakes He made Him to be sin," explains St. Paul (II Cor. 5:21). Our redemption required that the sins of every age and of all mankind, in all their horror and ugliness, be assumed by the divine Jesus - - THE SCAPEGOAT OF CALVARY.

Almost all the Gospel readings during Passiontime are found in St. John's Gospel, Chapters 7-12, and those of the previous Wednesday and Friday recount the two great miracles that foreshadow the Sacramental life of the Church - the healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus. In Jesus' life these events did much to concentrate the hatred of His enemies, and the Gospels of Passiontime portray the tension and somber atmosphere of the final conflicts that brought Him to the hour of His Sacred Passion.

When we meditate on the Passion during these two agonized weeks, let us not fail to notice its characteristic of universality: the universality of God's providence, its assertion of the all-embracing unity of the Human Race, the universal brotherhood of man, universal salvation through God's all redeeming love, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made to live." (ICor. 15:21)

Jesus, eternal God, became mortal Man in order to MEDIATE OUR REDEMPTION - to form a new people that would be His Mystical Self, and to bring all men into an eternal union with Father, Son and Holy Ghost. There can be no living of Christ without also living the price of mediation for souls. That price may vary for us - it may vary from mere fidelity in the performance of monotonous duty, to bearing with loneliness, depression, and misunderstanding, or even to suffering, sickness, violence and death. Sin continues in the world about us, therefore suffering for sin must continue also. When we suffer willing for the sake of Almighty God, we share in the Redemptive work of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.